

MR. & MRS. JOHN BROWN

AT HOME

BY "JOHN BROWN"

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MR. & MRS. JOHN BROWN
AT HOME

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PREFACE.

With the sole exception of "My Wife's Honour," which originally appeared in the CIVIL AND MILITARY GAZETTE, all these sketches have been published in the PIONEER, and I owe a debt of thanks to the proprietors of these papers for the courtesy with which they have permitted me to republish them.

JOHN BROWN.

TO MY WIFE
THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECT OF THESE SKETCHES
AND
BUT FOR WHOSE PRESENCE THEY WOULD NEVER HAVE
BEEN WRITTEN THIS LITTLE VOLUME
IS WITH HER KIND PERMISSION DEDICATED
BY HER AFFECTIONATE HUSBAND AND
MOST OBEDIENT SERVANT

• The Author

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WANTED A LADY'S HORSE.



I.

WANTED A LADY'S HORSE.

"In the opinion of the world, marriage ends all as it does in a comedy. The truth is precisely the reverse. it begins all."

MY mare Blackbird was just about as perfect a lady's pony as it would be possible to find throughout the length and breadth of India. Handsome as paint, long and low, with good shoulders, lengthy blood-like quarters, and a coat like black satin, she was just a picture under a side-saddle. Then she was besides as easy as a rocking-horse, thoroughly temperate, and so light in hand that you might ride her on a snaffle with a piece of thread.

I like to smoke a quiet pipe at the stables on a Sunday morning. On this particular Sabbath I was sitting on an inverted bucket before Blackbird's loose box, feeding her with seraps of lucerne, and stroking her velvety nose as she stretched her long neck for the coveted morsels, when "Horsey" Hunter turned up. Horsey was a hippophilist. He seemed to spend his leisure in visiting the stables of everyone in the station. As long as he was looking at a horse and sucking a bit of grass, he was happy. I offered him another bucket and a long piece of *doob*, and then we sat and looked at the mare. "Yes," he said oracularly, "she is a nice pony—a deuced nice pony; but I tell you what it is, John, she is lost on you. She ought to belong to a lady. Ta, ta,;" and Horsey

strutted off in his breeches and gaiters, singing "We'll all go a-hunting to-day," as was his wont, until his voice was lost in the distance. His remark set me athinking—was it selfish of me, a man, to possess a lady's pony! And if so, should I give Blackbird to a lady, or a lady to Blackbird? And then somehow I came to think of pretty Miss Winstanley, with her big brown eyes, who had made me feel so queer at the Hills the year before. The idea of Miss Winstanley on Blackbird made my heart beat so loud and fast, I could almost fancy I heard the thumps. "Why," said I, "there will not be such another combination in the whole of India." "By Jove! I'll do it," I resolved, and I kicked the bucket to the other end of the stable verandah with a clang that nearly made Blackbird jump out of her skin with fright.

That day week I was on my way to the Hills. In less than a fortnight I was at the Club Fancy Ball, sitting with Miss Winstanley in the verandah, while the band was playing "Love's Golden Dream." I felt so all-overish that I did not half know what I was saying. I stuttered like a school-boy over an unstudied page of Virgil. I believe I eventually faltered out that I wanted to give her to a mare. Miss Winstanley said it was the most extraordinary proposal she had ever had; and fanned herself so furiously that her fan snapped off in the middle. She did not seem to be at all at ease herself. I then meditated falling on my knees; but the verandah was so confoundedly dusty that I declared my intention of flinging myself over the *khud* instead. Rather than that, Miss Winstanley said she would accept the mount. So it was settled.

When my wife first rode Blackbird I was a proud man that day; I could look at nothing else. My eyes wandered from the mare's nose up to my wife's face, and from her face down to Blackbird's banded tail, until they set off at a gallop, because my wife said I made her feel quite nervous.

But, alas! we are not meant to be happy in this world. About three months afterwards, my wife returned from her ride in a fuster. She hit herself with her riding switch in such a way that I thought she was performing a sort of flagellation penance. "I'll never ride that mare again," she said, "NEVER. Nothing will ever induce me to. NOTHING. So don't ask me. THERE," and she flogged herself off to her room, as if she were a child playing at horses.

I was aghast! Not ride Blackbird, the handsome, the immaculate, the perfect lady's pony? What next? Why, it was sacrilege, a breach of contract, a violation of our marriage-bond. I would as soon have expected to hear Blackbird say she objected to be ridden by Mrs. Brown. I have never quite got to the bottom of this business. Whether the mare insisted on stopping just as my wife was meeting Mrs. Prunes-Prism, whom she wished to cut, or whether she declined to look spirited and lively when passing Mrs. Redfern-Bengough, whom my wife dislikes, I am not able to say, but it was some very petty offence of this nature.

My wife does not like Mrs. Bengough because *her* habit was made by Wolmershausen, while my wife's was turned out from Old Court House Street, Calcutta. In a confiding moment after dinner, my wife once said to me: "Do you know Mrs. Redfern-Bengough's habit gives her as much a better figure than mine as I have naturally a better figure than she has." I thought this a very nice point, but I was not able to give my own opinion, as I had never seen Mrs. Bengough with her habit off. I said I was willing to sit in judgment on them like Paris of old. The offer was declined, which was a pity: it would have settled a long-standing feud, and one of the ladies would have been richer by an apple. It may be a betrayal of domestic confidence, but my wife likes to bucket her horse past Mrs. Bengough to hide a wrinkle in her habit near the left shoulder.

Of course I was annoyed about Blackbird, but there was no help for it. When my wife gets a fad into her head, nothing short of a surgical operation will remove it. The more I tried to persuade her, the more obstinate—on the "*odisse quem læseris*" principle—she became. Blackbird never was forgiven, and a report soon sprung up in the station that she was a vicious brute,—a kicker, a rearer, a man-eater, and goodness knows what. On the strength of this report, Horsey button-holed me at the Club one evening. He said that, as the mare had turned out badly, he wouldn't mind taking her cheap. I was savage, and told him, cheap or no, *he* had not money enough to buy her. Horsey did not chew any of my stable grass for a good month after that.

I had then to hunt about for another mount, and not knowing of a suitable horse in the station, I wrote to my friend Chifney. I never yet consulted Chifney without hearing that he had the *very* thing to suit me. He said, as I was a friend, he would send me the horse on approval. The horse arrived in due course. He was a dun, and not bad looking; a trifle short in the rein for a lady and a bit lumpy in his action, but he was quiet and well mannered, and I thought he might do. When my wife came into the verandah to look at him, she said: "What! a *yellow* horse; that won't suit the colour of my habit at all." This was a contingency I had not looked for.

"What?" I said.

"No," she replied, shaking her head: "I won't have a horse of that colour."

"A good horse," I answered, "can't be of a bad colour."

"Nonsense," she said. "You will be telling me next that a good dress cannot be of a bad colour. I never heard such stuff."

That horse went back to Chifney, and though I paid the carriage both ways, he has never been quite the same to me

since. He wanted to know what the devil I meant by calling his horse yellow. Chifney is not a married man.

My next move was intended to be a pleasant surprise for my wife. Regardless of expense, I bought an arab for her. He was a clipping little bright bay, absolutely without vice, but an eager, free-going, cut-and-come-again little fellow. Unfortunately he turned out too fresh. It is not that my wife is a bad rider. She has a very pretty seat on horseback, and does not at all object to a good gallop. But my wife in camp, with her hair done in a blob at the back, with a good, sensible hat slammed on to her head and tied with strings under her chin, is *one woman*: in a station, with her hair tortured into a "Marteaux Catogan" *coiffure*, and a small sailor's hat balanced at the top, with balancing pins, is *another*.

One day, after he had been a week in the stable, the arab was so fresh that he got quite beyond my wife. We were riding together to the band, when my wife suddenly passed me like a streak of greased lightning. I did not like to race up to her, lest I should frighten her mount the more, so I followed at a distance, picking up her trail by means of her hat, and hat spikes, and hair pins, which marked the path of her mad career. I caught her up about five miles from the station. The arab had then run himself out: and my wife was busy doing up one plait of her hair with both hands at the back of her head, while she held the end of the other in her mouth. "Oh, Hubby!" she mumbled through her tresses, "I should like to have a good cry."

"Why?" I said, handing her her hat and a handful of assorted pins. "You stuck on like a Trojan. I am very proud of you."

"Oh, it's not that," she said. But I passed that dreadful woman Mrs. Bengough."

"What then?" I asked. "I warrant she did not see the wrinkle in your back this time."

"No, no," she replied. "But I told the wretch my hair was so long that I could sit upon it, and now she has seen it down."

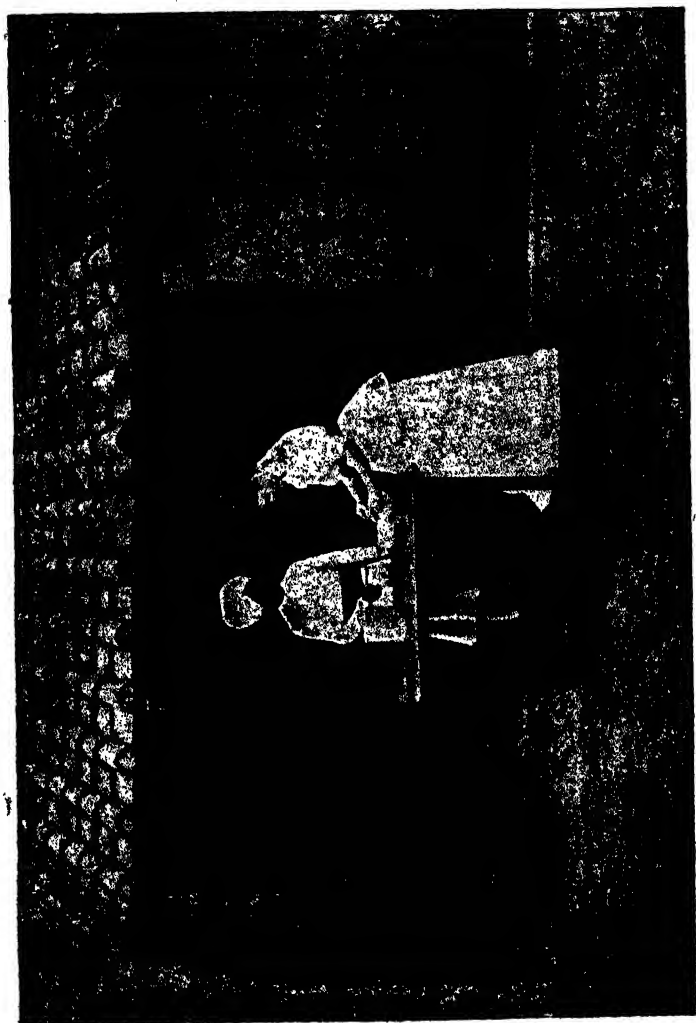
After this little incident the arab was laid by for camp use solely, and my wife said I *must* get her a quiet horse for the station. "I don't care what it is," she said, "but let it be *quiet*, and allow me to keep my hair up."

I bought a quiet beast after some search. She was a roan mare, Ratafia, heavy, stolid, and as slow as a man.

A child might hang on to her tail, or you might fire a cannon off her back without disturbing her equanimity. It is true she was not handsome. She had a ewe neck, a goose rump, a fiddle head held low, and a slouching action. But her appearance was the worst part of her; she was not a bad beast to go; she had a very fair walk and trot; and a long, easy, lumbering canter. My wife turned up her nose when she saw her. She said the mare reminded her of a verandah-made dress. However, she was forced to admit her paces were satisfactory, and one fine afternoon we started for the Gymkhana.

As ill-luck would have it, we passed the ubiquitous Mrs. Bengough. She put up her pince-nez and said: "Ah! how d'ye do, *dear* Mrs. Brown;" and then remarked in a stage whisper to her attaché, "Mrs. Brown is coming down in the world. It used to be an arab, and now it's an *ekka* pony." My wife rode Ratafia no more.

We are still on the look-out for a suitable mount. What we want is a regular fraud of a horse. He must be handsome and showy; so absolutely quiet that he will not interfere with the balance of an elaborate *coiffure*; and yet so prancy that a wrinkle in a habit will not show. He must be inwardly quiet, but outwardly ferocious. He mustn't do anything; but he is required to snort and champ his bit, and look like a regular teaser. We do not want a lion in sheep's clothing, but a sheep in lion's clothing. No "yellow" horses need apply.



MY WIFE'S BREAD.

II.

MY WIFE'S BREAD.

"Gets him to rest, cramm'd with distressful bread."

—Henry V.

"HUBBY!" said my wife, one day, as she burst into my office-room with her store clothes on, "I have been to return Mrs. Cook's call. O! what do you think," she added impressively, "*I have learnt to make bread.*"

"Hurrah!" I said, with visions before me of delicious hot French rolls for *chota-hazari*, of crisply crusted cottage loaves for breakfast, of toothsome Coburgs for thin bread and butter, and of wholesome brown bread with the Christmas oysters. "Hurroosh!" and I commenced dancing a *pas de seul* on my office *durri*.

"Now, don't be stupid," said the wife severely, as she removed from her head a gimcrack, which I, believe she called a bonnet, and in which, in spite of my remonstrances, she insisted on braving the Indian sun. "Don't be stupid, and listen, and remember what I am going to say, because I am sure to forget. Three-and-a-quarter tablespoonfuls of flour, one-and-a-half teaspoonfuls of Yeatman's yeast powder, a small cup full of milk, a pinch of salt, mix and bake quickly. There. Isn't it lovely?"

"Yes, indeed," I said, looking at the bonnet, "but I wish you wouldn't go out in the sun with those baubles on."

"You stupid. I mean the bread. Now, mind, don't forget, three-and-a-quarter *tablespoonfuls* of flour, one-and-a-half *teaspoonfuls* of powder. I shall ask you to-morrow." And off she rustled, leaving me once more to my pipe and papers.

Next morning she was hard at it: a coquettish little apron on, her pretty arms bared to the elbow, flour and milk and all the paraphernalia around her, and her red lips pursed up as if she meant business. Presently a loaf was brought in for my inspection. It was a tin loaf, and when outturned, suggested building material, but being hot and fresh, it smelt good and was put by for tiffin. We went for that loaf at lunch, and the loaf put its back up and went for us. The loaf conquered. We turned the edges of three knives, broke the teeth of a saw, and smashed a can-opener without making any impression on it. I afterwards, when I had spent my appetite on *chuppattis*, carried it into my office. I contemplated trying the effect of a disintegrator or dynamite upon it, but I was busy, and it lay by, until one morning that fellow Parker dropped in. Parker is a Civil Engineer, and thinks no small beer of himself. As we were talking, he suddenly spotted the loaf, and seized upon it.

"Hullo!" he said, "where the deuce did you get this?"

I did not reply at first. I am fond of my wife, and wasn't going to have her loaf criticised by a chap like Parker; so I said: "Drop that, what does it matter to you?"

"Go to Banff," he replied irreverently. "Will you let me have it?"

"No, I won't," I said. "Why—what do you take it for?"

"Take it for!" he answered, "why, for a bit of Aberdeen granite, and a very nice specimen too. I'll trim it up a bit, and use it for the foundation-stone of the new Dufferin Hospital. The Viceroy shall lay it with a silver trowel."

I smiled a sickly smile, but didn't let on. Parker carried off his block of granite, and I thought I saw him grin as he hoisted it into his tum-tum. I don't like Parker. I never feel sure whether he is pulling my leg or not. My wife was a bit sore when I told her about it, but after all, as I said,

it is something when a loaf that the eaters rejected becomes the headstone of a Dufferin Hospital. My wife said she felt inclined to have a good cry, and asked me if I thought it manly and funny to make jokes at her expense. I began to wish that Mrs. Cook had never been born. Suddenly a happy thought seemed to strike my wife as she was in the act of threading a needle.

"That loaf was over-baked, Hubby," she said, with an air of great conviction. "It will be all right next time. You see."

I did see, and no mistake. The next loaf was brought in on a plate.

"This is not hard," said the wife, prodding it with her forefinger till she left a hole in it.

It was *not* hard. It was like a lump of soft putty. I said it had better go to Parker too; it would do for mortar to fix his granite block in.

"If you are going to make any more of your unfeeling jokes," said my wife, "I shall leave the room." And she did.

I afterwards threw that loaf at a sparrow that had been annoying me all day. I missed the sparrow, but the missile stuck on the wall like a pat of moist clay.

My wife said that loaf was *under*-baked. I was going to reply that her remark was self-evident, but restrained myself in time. The third loaf was still more curious. It was hard outside, pulp inside. It resembled a kind of fruit with a stony rind and a slushy interior. It was like a bad nut, devilish hard to crack, and no good when it was cracked. The outside threatened to break one's teeth, while the inside had to be eaten with a spoon. There was a novelty about it, but it was not wholesome. I did not feel very well afterwards, and had to fortify myself with a dose of brandy and peppermint.

My wife is nothing if she be not persistent. She said :—
“Ah! not enough baking powder that time. I'll put it right to-morrow.” She used about half a tin of the medicament on the next lump of dough, and that loaf was full of promise. It was as light as meerschaum, as sea foam, and was most pleasing in external appearance. It cut so nice and crisp that my wife crooned with delight.

“Don't say I can't make bread,” she said. Her mouth fell when she tasted it. It had a strong twang of a chemist's shop; it was yellow in colour, and crumbly in texture. It fizzed in the mouth like *sherbet*, and might have been a cake of calcined soda.

Parson Polson was calling that morning. He is a bit of a gardener. We showed him the bread: he smelt it and said it should be crushed and applied to the roots of our choicest plants because it was an admirable manure.

“I think there must be something wrong with the flour,” said my wife. “Shall I try brown bread?”

“The very thing,” I replied. “Wholemeal bread, of course. The doctors all swear by it. The inner part of a grain of wheat is all gluten and starch; it's the shell that contains the nitrogen and all nourishing constituents; wholemeal, by all that's holy.”

I don't know what that loaf resembled, unless it was a cake of Rogers' compressed fodder. I could recommend it for service in Afghanistan. It was hard and compact, with a specific gravity about that of *lignum vitae*. It would not easily catch fire, nor blow about in a high wind. It was a good, serviceable *khaki* colour. It might be served out in chips, which, soaked in water, would afford a good filling meal. When not required for rations, it would make excellent temporary fortifications, quite impenetrable to musket bullets. It might be made in one or two maund blocks, so as to be suitable for either mule or camel loads.

This was not the last attempt by any means. We have tried American flour, *maida*, *sooji*, and *atta*, and various mixtures of the same. We have tried Borwick's baking powder and Yeatman's yeast powder as the raising material. We have used milk, water, and milk-and-water, hot, cold and luke warm, as the mixing vehicle. We have baked in a cold oven, a hot oven, and a burning fiery furnace. We have moulded rolls, scones, tin loaves, cottage loaves, and every sort of shape. We have outturned results of all consistencies, from that of bloater paste to that of cast iron. But we have never made bread.

Will some one kindly teach my wife how to do it. I am not a fish to nibble at lumps of dough, nor an ostrich to be nourished on brickbats, and I am fast becoming a confirmed dyspeptic.

III. MY WIFE'S MATHEMATICS.

"Though it make the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve."

—*Hamlet*.

WE (wife and I) were sitting one evening after dinner over our cheroots and coffee—I mean our cheroot and coffees: my wife does not smoke. I sometimes tell her it is about the only vice she hasn't got. My wife had a piece of dull dark-red silk and another piece of dull light-green silk. She was chucking these about after the manner of women, and said she was evolving a tea-cosy. I was occupied in lazily looking through some old *Graphics*. Suddenly I said: "Just fancy that girl Philippa Fawcett being Senior Wrangler. There's a wife for a lucky man."

"Why?" said the wife, as she scrumpled up her silks in a bunch and viewed them at arm's length, with her head very much on one side.

"Why? Why, because she's so clever. What a help she would be to a chap."

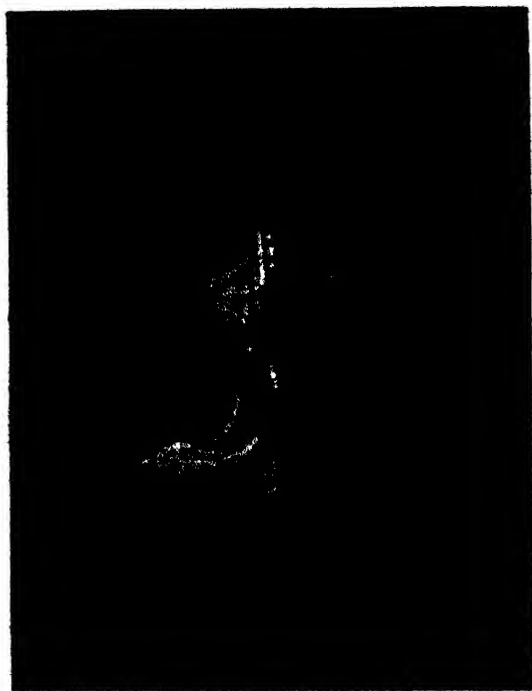
"Oh, she's a clever old frump, is she?" said my wife with her teeth full of pins, which were rapidly being removed from her mouth and jobbed into the silks.

"Old frump! nothing of the sort. She's a girl younger than you are."

"Awfully ugly, I expect. Those clever girls always are."

"Not at all. She's very nice-looking."

"Why, how do you know?"



MY WIFE'S MATHEMATICS.

"Here's her picture in the *Graphic*."

"Oh, that's nothing. She probably sent a photograph of her prettiest sisters."

"But she's an only child."

"Never mind. It's all the same. She sent a friend's photo. You don't suppose she would send her own, if she were ugly, do you."

"Why not?"

"Oh, well, Hubby, you're a man, and it's no use arguing with men, because they can't understand things. But what is a Senior Wrangler?"

"Why, dear, it means she is the head mathematician of the year at Cambridge. Beat all the men, you know."

"Beat the men, did she? Well that's not much; any woman could do that."

"Well, dear, I notice you can never work out what a servant's pay comes to if he leaves in the middle of a month."

"O, good gracious! Does she do sums? I thought you said she was a matheme-something, and awfully clever. Anybody can do sums."

"Then why don't you, instead of bothering me when I am busy."

"Because I'm married, you stupid. If I were an old maid like Miss Philippa Wrangler, I should do my sums myself. What's the good of a husband, I'd like to know, if he can't do sums for you? But there's nothing difficult in sums—is there?"

"Well, if a herring-and-a-half cost three half-pence, what would be the price of one herring?"

"How like a man! Now who would buy half a herring? You really must be sensible, Hubby, and not ask these silly conundrums."

"Well, look here. If a man——"

"No, no, I really can't do these matheme—botherums after dinner." And my wife stopped her ears by clapping the red silk to one side of her pretty head, the green silk to the other. Have you quite finished?"

"But, seriously, dear, I wish you would learn to do these simple Rule-of-Three sums."

"Rule-of-Three! That's fearfully difficult, isn't it? I am sure I never got as far as Rule-of-Three. I don't believe Miss Senior Fawcett herself could do Rule-of-Three."

"Will you learn if I give you a present?"

"A present? Done, that's a bargain now. We will settle it so. You set me a sum, and if I bring it to you done correctly in an hour, you give me a present. Yes? All right. But it must be in the day time, not after dinner, and not difficult like that herring question. Yes? Done." And my wife, smiling as if the present were hers already, pitched into her silks in such a way that I shortly had dim visions of some shape emerging from the chaos.

The next day after breakfast I set the following sum:—
If a servant on nine rupees a month be dismissed on the 11th in a month of thirty-one days, what pay is due to him for ten days' work? She carried this off, with a grave frown on her pretty forehead, while I lighted my pipe and strolled down to my stables. When I returned the frown was replaced by a smile. She put a piece of paper in my hand. "There," she said, "there, don't forget the present." The sum was quite correct, two rupees fourteen annas five pies. "Well done, dear," I said, patronisingly, and as I climbed into my dog-cart to drive to office, I remarked to myself that by a little wholesome and judicious treatment a man could make anything of a woman.

The very next day my wife invaded my den! with a dress over each arm, and said: "Hubby, I must get rid of that

dhobi ; he's just dreadful. See what he's done to these frocks."

"All right, dear," I replied, "that's your department ; you know I don't interfere."

"Well, just tell me what his wages come to, if——"

"Eh? What's that?"

"Oh, yes, Hubby, just this once," she said beseechingly.

"No, no," I replied determinedly. "You must work it out yourself."

"But," she said demurely, as she fingered the chicken work on the white frock, "I am afraid I don't know how."

"Not know? What do you mean? How did you manage it yesterday?"

"Well, Hubby," she said, putting her hand on my arm, you are looking so handsome this morning, and you won't be angry if I tell you. But I am afraid you will think my way such a stupid way."

"It does not matter a bit about the way," I said, considerably mollified.

"The *end* is the great thing," I added sententiously, "the means is a secondary affair."

"Ah, dear," she said, squeezing my arm a bit, "you put these things so nicely. I am sure no one is half as clever as you are. That Fawcett girl would never have beaten the men if you had been at Cambridge. I am so glad you don't mind about the way it was done. I just took the sum to your Babu in the verandah and he worked it out for me. Only," here she sighed, "he is not here to-day, and we did not agree that I should work it out myself—did we, dear? I was to bring it to you done within an hour—wasn't I? And I did—didn't I? And here's a pencil and paper, make out the dhobi's wages—there's a love."

Does not Thackeray, addressing the men, speaking of the sex^s, say somewhere "that you are the stronger I admit, but that you are the cleverer I very much doubt." I mounted my dog-cart that morning with different feelings. My wife blew a kiss to me as I started and said :—Don't forget the present, dear. I wrote for the present. It came in due course. I placed it unopened in my wife's hands, but fled while she delightedly undid the wrappers ; I fled because, what do you think it was—a "Ready Reckoner."



MY WIFE'S FISH.

IV. MY WIFE'S FISH.

"You'll take my tale with a little salt,
But it needs none nevertheless."

—A. L. Gordon.

IT has somehow got about that my wife has made an extraordinary capture, and I have received so many inquiries on the subject that I am pretty well sick of it. No. She was *not* fishing on the Poonch. Was it a *mahseer*? *No*. A fifty-pounder? *Certainly not*. I am going to make a clean breast of it, and pray Heaven she may never see the explanation in print. This is how it was.

We were stopping for a few days at the Rohutank Dāk Bungalow, and my wife had the vapours. We were just experiencing the first burst of the hot weather, a foretaste of the pleasures to come. I am not at all sure that this period is not more trying than the real unadulterated article. When once a woman makes up her mind to stop down all the hot weather, she is as near an angel as it is possible for her to be. She sees to the *punkhas*, puts up the *tattis*, ices the butter, cools the drinks, gets into a shadowy, rustling morning gown, and altogether makes you so comfortable that you almost wish it were always hot. But that first burst of heat always catches her unprepared. It is hot, and the cold weather routine is still upon her. Moreover, the Rohutank Dāk Bungalow is *not* calculated to improve the temper. It is small and dirty, and badly arranged. Mosquitoes infest the air; black ants—real *slippers*—swarm upon the floor. Consequently when I say that my wife had the vapours it was perhaps not to be wondered at.

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" she said. The way she made play with her fan meant mischief. A married man soon becomes weatherwise in these little signs of matrimonial dust-storms. They are of all sorts and intensities, from the disturbance which takes the form of dust-devils whirligigging down the dusty road in a way that makes you laugh—if you are only at a safe distance—to the *bara tufan*, when the air is thick with dust, black as thunder, followed by a heavy shower of rain—I was nearly saying tears.

"Will you play tennis?" I asked uneasily. I knew so well what the answer would be.

"Are you mad?" she said with a pout of her red lips. "Tennis in this scorching weather?"

"Well, shall we ride?" I suggested shrinkingly. She did not answer this, but gave me one look, and shrugged her shoulders and sighed, as if to imply that it was no good replying to such an idiotic proposal.

"What would you care to do?" I asked feebly, after a time, when the silence was becoming unbearable.

"I want to fish," she said.

This, I must admit, took me by surprise. My wife had never fished in her life, and knew as much about it as I did about yoked under-clothing. I suppose I must have looked at her blankly, because presently she continued—

"What are you staring at? Are you deaf? I said I want to *fish*. Is there anything extraordinary in that? I want to *fish*. F, I, S, H, = fish."

"Oh, very well, dear," I said, "so you shall. You have come to the right place for that. Why, there is Yuba Bill at Rohutank, one of the finest fishermen in India. I have no doubt he will be only too pleased to lend you a rod and initiate you in all the mysteries of tank-fishing. I'll drop him a line at once."

"Dear Bill," I wrote, "my wife is not very well this afternoon, and says she wants to fish. Will you like a good chap lend her a rod and show her how to manipulate it. And look here," I continued, "*she must catch something* if not by fair means, by foul; and the bigger the fish the better; a young whale if possible, but none of your minnows. You are a married man yourself, and will understand what I mean."

Presently the answer came back—"Dear John, will do my best for you. Meet me at the tank at 5."

"It is all right, my dear," I shouted to my wife, who was dressing in the next room, elaborating a fishing toilet. "Mr. Yuba Bill will meet us at the tank at 5 o'clock."

"Does he say it is a good day for fishing?" she asked in jerks, as she harpooned her sailor hat on to her head with ten-inch spikes. "Good day? Why he says what Paddy did of the hares on the Clare hills. 'Fish, yer honour: is it fish ye mane? Ah, thin, but they'll tormint ye!'"

I spoke boldly, but not without uneasy qualms of conscience. Bill had fished the tank for two hours that morning without getting a bite. If he foresakes me now, I thought to myself, I will never forgive him. Presently my wife emerged from her room to pour out the tea. She looked as innocent as a daisy and as fresh as a pink. I paid her a compliment, and she told me not to be stupid, but looked pleased all the same. The clouds certainly seemed to be clearing a bit.

From the Dák Bungalow to the tank is only a few minutes' walk, and we found Yuba Bill and his rods up to time. The hooks were baited with lumps of dough, and my wife initiated into the mysteries of Thomas' patent labco float, and all the rest of it. It was all Greek to her, but she nevertheless opened her big brown eyes and looked very wise. Five minutes, ten minutes, twenty minutes, no bite; my wife looked very patient, but her little feet were tap-tapping the steps of the *ghat* in a way I did not altogether like. I

looked imploringly at Bill, who held the other rod, and was relieved when he winked. 'Do you see that chap with the net over there?' he asked. 'He is my baitman; let us go and see if he has caught any *chilwas*.' We left my wife watching her float anxiously; and lo, just on the other side of a patch of trees and undergrowth, the *soi-disant* baitman had just pulled his net to land, and half-a-dozen big, glittering fishes were flapping and wriggling on the wet water slope. Bill looked at me, put his finger to his nose, and winked again. He then judiciously selected the biggest fish—a healthy-looking *rohu* of three or four pounds—and deliberately hooked it. I could hardly speak with excitement and fear, lest my wife should see, but she is short-sighted, and Bill eventually worked himself back to his old position without arousing any suspicions.

Then he said quite carelessly: "Mrs. Brown, I don't think you are getting a bite there, come and try this rod." So I relieved my wife at her position, and she took charge of the other. Yuba Bill's face was a picture. Watching the float with much gravity, he said suddenly "Why, I do believe you have a bite—strike." My wife gave an upward jerk, and feeling the weight of the hooked labeo, screamed of course. The scene that followed was as good as a play, but my pen refuses to do justice to it. How shall I describe the way in which my wife screamed again and again, and implored Mr. Bill to advise her; how she asked him to take the rod and play the fish for her, and how he indignantly refused when he knew she could do it quite as well or better herself; how Mr. Bill explained to her the way to run out the line and wind it up again; how my wife shrieked in her excitement and laughed in her glee; how grave she looked when told to keep the top of the rod up; how frightened when she thought the line would break; how pleased when informed the fish was giving in, and that she might tow it to the bank. How shall I describe the gravity with which Yuba Bill eventually gaffed the fish, and laid it reverently on

the ground : or the thousand and one questions my wife asked as she watched its dying struggles : what was its name ; its weight : was it good to eat ; it was ; was it ? how nice ; would oyster or anchovy sauce be the proper concomitant ; had so large a fish ever been caught before, and so on. How shall I tell the way we shouted for the Dāk Bungalow *Ahansamah*, and how he came running up in great haste, twisting his *kamarband* around him as he ran ; how he was followed by half-a-dozen other servants ; how they were all informed that the *mem-sahib* had caught the fish ; how they expressed their wonder and delight at her extraordinary skill ; how the *Ahansamah* was ordered to carry the fish away very carefully, and cook it for dinner in his very best form. How shall I describe the way in which my wife clapped her hands with pleasure, how I kissed her before the crowd as if it were the most natural thing to do ; how she blushed ; how I shook hands with Yuba Bill till my arms ached ; how we all shook hands with Mrs. Bill, who had arrived on the scene ; how we all congratulated my wife, and had a peg all round, even my wife, who thought she deserved it after all the exertion she had gone through. How shall I explain the way in which the fish was brought up for dinner ; how we ate it, bony as it was and woolly as it was, and declared it the nicest fish we had ever tasted ; how my wife noted the event down in her diary ; and I, looking up at the star-lit sky, remarked that the threatened dust-storm of the afternoon had blown away, and that the air was as clear as crystal. This is all a matter of history.

I told the incident to my brother, who has strict ideas ; he looked at me gravely and said he thought it "fishy—" a remark which I did not feel myself in a position to contradict.

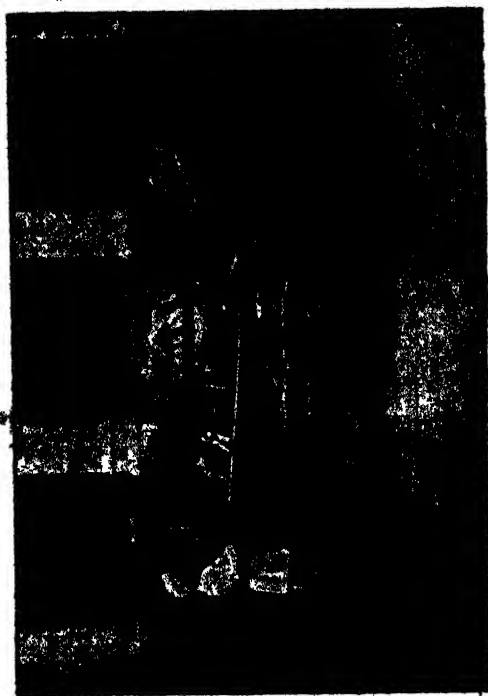
V.

WAITING FOR THE WIFE.

"Tous les hommes sont menteurs, inconstants, faux, bavards, hypocrites, orgueilleux, ou lâches. Toutes les femmes sont perfides, artificieuses, vaineuses."

TO generalise, it may be said that every married man knows what "waiting for the wife" means. To some it may be as common as their daily bread; others only understand the term robbed of half its terrors; but, nevertheless, every Benedict is subject to it, as is a child to whooping cough and measles, and other evils of this life. Happy he who knows how to realise *inter delicias semper aliquid sævi nos strangulat*. There is no sense in knocking one's head against a stone wall. It is much better to recognise that the wall is there, and to walk round it.

A man once told me that he had worked out an elaborate set of house-keeping tables for his wife in the odd half hours he had waited for her. This was heaping coals of fire on her head. Another said he had mastered a new science by utilising these scraps of time; they were, he said, the quietest moments of his days. A third, who had a taste for gardening, and whose front-door plot was always ablaze with flowers, informed me that he "waited" for his wife every afternoon, and employed the time in the garden with his *quail*. He said that eventually he arrived at quite looking forward to these intervals of leisure so entirely his own. These men were all philosophers in their way, and they were wise.



WAITING FOR THE WIFE

My own wife is, at the same time, a very rapid and a very slow dresser. She is like a man who wastes no time over his dinner proper, but who will subsequently go on indefinitely toying with the walnuts and the wine. The former is regarded in the light of a duty which must be performed ; the latter as a pleasure to fondly linger over. As far as the ordinary masculine eye can discern she is fully equipped as soon as I am myself. It is then that the delay begins. Apparently she has only to clap her hat on her head and she is ready to start. But there's the rub. The hat that so became her yesterday makes her look "frightful" to-day. She must change it; having changed it, she must alter her hair to suit the hat: having altered her hair she does not fancy the *tout ensemble*, and there is a complete overthrow of the dynasty—I mean of that particular turn-out. My wife once occupied two-and-a-half hours in this way, and was positive she had not been longer than fifteen minutes. But hats apart, there is the dab of the powder-puff; the touch of the opoponax; the shifting of the fall of the dress a hair's breadth this way or that; the selection from the jewel case; and all the bagatelles of a woman's toilette, plentifully interleaved with front, side and back views in the mirror. She becomes so absorbed in these trifles that half an hour passes like a dream; and for all that she remembers there might be no such being as the impatient male, who is in the meanwhile pacing so fretfully up and down the front verandah.

When at last the butterfly does emerge from the chrysalis, the battle is by no means over. My wife's appearance is heralded by three questions:—"How do you think I look? Is there any powder on my face? Where shall I hide my keys?"

Stock-questions as these are, they are by no means to be lightly regarded. I will refer to them *seriatim*.

Like Charles Lamb "genius fails me, but I grow clever." In reply to number one, I have made it a rule to pay my wife

a compliment. This is politic. It puts her into a good temper, and makes her break out into smiles, and dimples, and white teeth. There is nothing like making a good start. Secondly, if the equipage be condemned, as likely as not she would return to change it. I once said I did not care about my wife's turn-out, and she asked me to wait a minute and returned to her dressing-room. I waited a minute; I waited forty-five, and then she re-appeared in a complete change of kit. I did not make this mistake a second time. Lastly, any adverse criticism might possibly lead her to admit that I was right, and that she had not a dress fit to be seen in, and that a few new ones were urgently required. Benedicts have to be on their guard against such contingencies. Nor must the compliment be of the "damn with faint praise" order. It must not be slurred over like the administration of Gregory's powder in jam. If the Gregory be there, there must be a plentiful amount of jam to hide it. There must be no hurried "Yes, yes, you look all right," accompanied by a bolt for the door. No right-minded woman will stand that. She requires to be deliberately viewed all round. Personally, I happen to be lucky; and knowing me to be a lazy man, my wife considerably revolves on her own axis like a zoetrope, or wheel of life. Any little favourable criticism at this stage will not be thrown away. The more trifling the detail it refers to, the better. Any man can see whether a woman be wearing a black frock, or a blue, or a white, but to remark how exquisitely the flowers she is wearing match her ribbons, how tastefully she has adjusted the angle of her hat, or what a sweet dreamy air that lace gives her, shows an attention to details that is justly appreciated. I once made my wife happy for a week by a happy allusion of this description.

The question of the violet powder (I believe Vinolia is the fashion now-a-days) is necessarily a delicate one. To show you are really deeply interested, it is as well to touch the tip of the nose, or the dimple on the chin, with a pocket handkerchief, as if to remove any excess of bloom. This

touch must be exceedingly light, as an entomologist might handle a butterfly's wing. If you decline these little offices, she will probably call upon you to change your house for one with a properly lighted dressing-room; or, for night work, to illuminate her room with electric light. The pocket handkerchief trick is the cheaper, and on the whole gives less trouble.

The matter of the keys is more serious than might at first sight appear. When my wife hides her keys, it is very doubtful if she will find them again. She invariably forgets where she put them. She once deposited the bunch in an old tea-pot, which had been long in disuse. I was condemned that evening to a whisky peg without the whisky; and the Tantalus stand made me endure the torments of the gentleman after whom it was named. I have since become an adept at finding hidden keys; but unfortunately, when I recollect that my wife's cash book and cash box are invariably in discord, I think it more than possible that one of the servants may be equally adroit.

The keys being secreted, it does not necessarily follow that we, even then, start at once. At the threshold of the door my wife will discover she has forgotten her pocket handkerchief; mounting the dog-cart, she will want her parasol; at the garden gate she will remember that there is a letter on her dressing-table which she wants with her to show to Mrs. Gup. We once made five false starts between the door and the gate.

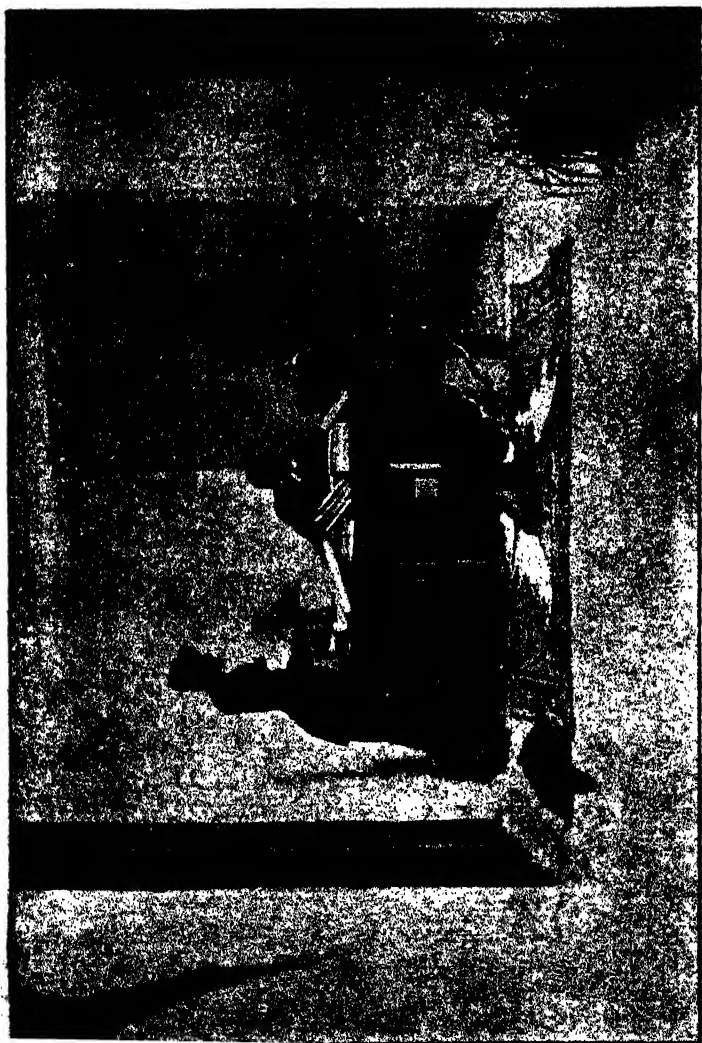
But hush! Here she is. "What," she says, "have you been waiting for me?" This is said with an air of innocence worthy of a better cause. She speaks as if it were a curious coincidence and not an every-day occurrence. She is apparently as astonished as the baker's wife in *Candide*, when told there was a man downstairs who disbelieved that the Pope was Antichrist.

"I suppose the trap is not ready," she continues. The trap has been at the door the last half hour, but she likes to imagine it as the cause of the delay. "What are you doing?" she then asks.

"Writing."

"Of course, and about something with no sense in it, I'll be bound." My wife has "a tongue with a tang" when she likes.

"Possibly," I reply. "It is about yourself." She looks as if she were sorry she spoke.



CHRISTMAS CARDS.

VI.

CHRISTMAS CARDS.

Ven you're a married man, Samivel, you'll understand a good many things as you don't understand now; but vether it's vorth while going through so much to learn so little, as the charity boy said ven he got to the end of the alphabet, is a matter o' taste.—*Pickwick Papers*.

I FORGET exactly what my wife had done. Shè had sewn a button on my shirt, or darned a sock, or dressed in time for breakfast, or something unusual of that sort. The act had thrown me off my guard, and made me amiable and pleasant. She took advantage of it at once. "Hub, dear! may I buy twenty rupees worth of Christmas cards?" It never does to be too familiar and friendly with your wife, because she makes you pay for it. I remember, when I first came to India, travelling up-country with an elderly gentleman of—as I then thought—eccentric habits. He used to make curious mixtures at breakfast. Rice and eggs and fish; kijjaree and omelette and grilled mutton; curry and rice and Bombay ducks, and many descriptions of chutneys. I have since learnt that this is a custom of the country; but at any rate, it has nothing to do with what I have to say. On parting finally with my acquaintance, who had been playing Mentor to my Telemachus, he said: "Look here, my boy, let me offer you a piece of advice. Never praise a native. If you do, from that moment he will disappoint you to a certainty. If a servant, he will forthwith demand leave on full pay, or a rise in salary, or a new suit of clothes. If an official subordinate, he will run amuck, and within ten days you will probably have to report him for dismissal. Be just

and considerate, but don't let your tongue wag too much." I have frequently had cause to recollect this piece of counsel ; and I am not at all certain that the same advice does not apply to wives. As long as you lie quiet, she does not know what danger may not be lurking in your eye ; but caress her, and you pay for your dalliance. Since my marriage I have been compelled to study a grave and serious demeanour. I am positively afraid of wearing too jocular an aspect. Friends have told me I have a way of commencing a laugh, and then pulling myself up, and looking serious, like a clown at a circus. This is not without a reason. They say a laugh lengthens life : this may be true, but it shortens the purse, and then one may live too long. It is not a case of *Ridet Cæsar Pompeius flebit*, but of *Ridet Cæsar* and *Cæsar flebit*. As soon as the muscles of my face begin to relax, "bang goes" sixpence." A smile may mean the price of a new bonnet ; a decided grin would possibly let me in for a tailor-made dress ; while a good hearty laugh, and I might be dancing to the tune of a carriage and pair. I cannot therefore afford to laugh.

Let bachelors contemplating matrimony remember this. Let them also ponder over the remark that Marion Crawford in the *Three Fates* puts into the mouth of Totty—"The difference between men and women," she says to Mamie, "is very simple, my dear. Women look greater fools than they are and men are greater fools than they look." They do appear to be so quiet and sweet and simple, those girls, so worthy of being mistresses of the keys ; but wait until they climb into the box-seat, and hold the reins tight in those little hands. Isn't it Tacitus who says *Dignus imperio, nisi imperasset.* *

I am not sure that the quiet ones are not the more dangerous. When a man flusters and bullies and gets red in the face, there is not the slightest occasion for fear. You may snap your fingers under his nose. It is your quiet men, who say so little, who are so dangerous. Marshal Soult, in his

best days, was a nasty customer to tackle, and yet, we read, he had the face of an archbishop. I have a vivid recollection, too, of a day at the Saltford Regatta. I had been rowing in the "open fours;" and at the close of the afternoon collided with a quiet-looking gentleman of semi-clerical appearance. I trod on his favourite corn, or something of the sort, and he was so placidly impertinent. I was then in the flush of youth and strength, had fought my share of battles at school, and was, moreover, in a high state of training. Consequently when I undertook to teach the mild-looking gentleman a lesson in manners, I was not apprehensive of failure. He knocked me out in the second round, and I afterwards discovered he was the champion middle-weight boxer of England. When I collide with inoffensive clerical-looking gentlemen now, I take the precaution to ask whether he happens to be a champion pugilist before I assault him.

But to hark back. It so happened I was jocular and pleasant, and the wife caught me on the hop. I could not pull myself up out of a smile in time, so I relapsed into a sickly, nervous, hysterical titter, and consented. After all, Christmas is Christmas; twenty rupees don't break a man, and I was lucky to get off so cheap. It might have been that seal-skin cloak my wife was contemplating so earnestly in the *Lady's Pictorial* the day before. A lovely thing, reaching to the ground, with a collar about twelve inches high. Dirt cheap at a hundred pounds.

I do not often send cards myself; but once a year I sit down and write Christmas letters to old friends with whom I do not regularly correspond. With long distances between us, with years and years of absence, and a busy life, it is not easy to maintain an unbroken correspondence. But that Christmas letter prevents the tie from being altogether snapped. Speaking for myself, I would prefer receiving such a letter to a card. My wife says this is bad taste on my part, because a card is prettier than a letter. I had it on the tip of my tongue to reply that she was prettier than Mrs. Jones,

but not nearly so,—however, no matter, I clapped the stopper on in time, and said :

“Quite so, dear ; and the cards have another advantage. If financially expensive, they are economical from a time point of view. I suppose a man could send a hundred cards while another was writing half-a-dozen letters !”

She did not agree with this remark either, though I made it to please her, because she said one of the great pleasures of cards was taking a week to sort them, and ponder which should be sent to whom. This argument was a revelation. I had a sort of qualm that the twenty rupees were not to end the matter after all.

The 23rd and 24th of December are with me, as with many other men, busy days. There is always a struggle to clear the office table before Christmas, and consequently I was not ecstatic when my wife bustled into the room with a bundle under her arm.

“Look here, Hub ! This is a pretty one, isn’t it ? Shall I send it to Mary ?”

“Yes, certainly, send it to Mary.”

“But we must look at the words—

‘Old time the ferryman plies his oar
And rows us over from shore to shore.’”

“Oh, that would never do for Mary.”

“Why not ?”

“You, stupid. Don’t you know she is getting long in the tooth, and would think I was alluding to her age.”

“Well, send it to Gussie.”

“But there’s a picture of a woman on it, with red hair, and Gussie is so touchy about the colour of hers.”

“Send it to Mrs. Binks.”

“That won’t do either. The red-haired woman is carrying a baby, and the Binks have no children. She mightn’t like it.”

"Ah! I have it. Send it to Mrs. Dove; she is just cooling over her first."

"But her baby squints, and positively the one in the picture is cross-eyed. Isn't it a pity? what *shall* we do?"

"Send it to the—"

"Now, now; take care. Never mind, we'll leave that one for the present. Shall I send this to Miss Caprice? Listen; aren't the words sweet—

'Two understandings, one confidal,
Two blushes and a sigh, one bridal.'

"H—m—m. Her engagement is just broken of, isn't it?"

"So it is. How thoughtful of you, dear. We must let her have something consoling. But whom shall we send the bridal one to?"

"Send it to Clara. She's engaged, and on the spoon."

"Yes, yes. And there's a man on it with a twisted moustache, just like Peter."

"I don't know how long this might not have continued, but I was forced to strike at last, and deported my wife and her paraphernalia into the drawing-room. She returned presently like a bad half-penny, and said she had no envelopes large enough. It took two *chaprasis* and a *babu* about a day and a-half to make those coverings; and then they all had to be weighed. My wife has a very pretty correspondence in Christmas cards. We had a tiff over the postage. I said the twenty rupees should include the stamps. The wife said she would not have *believed* that *any* man could be so *mean*. Altogether I was not sorry to see the last of the budget.

On Christmas morning we had a heavy *ddk*. I think my best card was from my *khansamah*. It was a bottle of port, with the following label:—

"Futteh Khan *salaams*. Port wine for master. Accord-
ing to your honour's religion."

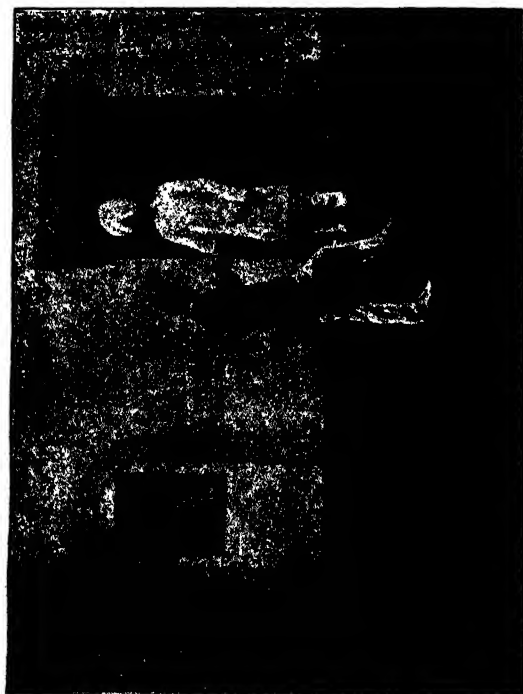
The port was excellent, so much so that I had a strong suspicion that it was abstracted from my own bin. I was contemplating the bottle with mixed feelings when my wife, whose tongue had been wound up, began to clap out merrily, like a musical box let loose—

"Hubby! Jack, Johnny, John, *are* you listening to me? Well, I never. Just fancy. Would you believe it, Tom and the Smithsons and Mrs. Jones have sent me such lovely cards, and I forgot all about them. I shall have to send them New Year's cards to make up, or they will be so hurt. And what do you think? I sent Mrs. Binks such a good one—a rupee one—and she has sent me a wretched six-pie-walla, one of her last year ones too. I can see where she has been trying to rub out the pencil marks at the back. Isn't it a shame? And Gussie and Jim and Mrs. Gup have sent me nothing at all. Aren't they mean?"

"Never mind, dear. They will probably send you New Year's ones, when they find you have not forgotten them."

"Pooh! some of their old Christmas cards, of course. It is not at all the same thing. I am extremely vexed with them."

I used to think Democritus, the laughing philosopher, was wiser in his generation than the other chap. But I expect Democritus was a bachelor, and Heractitus a married man. When I looked at my wife's troubled face I felt strangely moved to laughter; but I succeeded in pulling the cheek cord in time, and wept with Heractitus over the follies of mankind.



MY SECRET.

VII.

MY SECRET.

"No game was ever yet worth a rap,
For a rational man to play,
Into which no accident, no mishap
Could possibly find its way."

WHAT I mean to say is, a man had much better have no secret from his wife. No, not even if it be a matter for which he has no call to blush. A woman has an instinct for a secret like a vulture for a carcass. She may not be able to discover it all at once; but she will be swooping around, never fear; and then, my friend, if you value your peace of mind you had better, *much* better, unburthen yourself without delay, or look out for squalls.

With this little prelude, by way of *hors d'œuvres* to whet the appetite, I pass on to relate my own experience in this direction.

On the morning after the Railway opening dinner my wife had a headache. Why—I don't pretend to say. Now, if it had been that chap Bourne who, to my certain knowledge, went Nap, clean through the menu, both meats and drinks, from the consommé à la Tortue and the Punch à la Romaine down to the Café and Cognac, I should not have felt surprised. But my wife nibbled and "sipped" and suffered for it; while Bourne rose early next morning as fresh as a baby. This is one of those things no one can understand. We are not always treated in this world according to our deserts. However, there it was; my wife had the headache Bourne should have been afflicted with, and asked me to fetch her smelling-bottle.

Now, as my wife did not possess a smelling-bottle, I thought this unkind ; but, poor thing, she was in pain, and as she said, if she had possessed the article, she would have had it with her ; not having one, she called on me to fetch it. I kept silent. " Women are kittle-cattle to shoe ahint," as they say in the north-countrie, and it does not pay to argue with a woman, especially if she has a headache.

The next day my wife had forgotten all about the headache and the smelling salts too ; but her remark had sunk deep in my mind, and I thought I would arrange a little present for her on the quiet as a pleasant surprise. Accordingly, I wrote to Bombay for the bottle. It was to be teak-lined, copper-bottomed—I mean silver-mounted, hall-marked, salts at one end, vinaigrette at the other, and all the rest of it.

Unfortunately Messrs. Treacle and Company were out of the exact pattern I indented for, and they wrote and said so. My wife was having a round with her *khansamah* when the post came in, and I was able to secrete this letter in my side coat-pocket without her knowledge. This was all right, so far ; but later on, my wife, standing beside me, put her hand carelessly into that very pocket, and in my nervousness I clapped my hand on the letter to prevent its abstraction.

This act undid me.

" Ah," she said, " what's that ?"

" Nothing ?" I replied, nonchalantly with a view to put her off the scent. " Nothing."

" Nothing ?" she said. " I believe it's a letter."

" Well—yes," I said. " It is a letter ; a—a business letter. It's nothing—nothing."

" Let me see it," she urged, growing the more keen the more I tried to put her off.

" No, no," I answered. " Why do you want to see it ? It is only a—I mean—"

"Hubby!" she said quite earnestly, "you are trying to keep something back from me. I can see it in your face. Now, don't attempt to deny it. It is a letter—very well. Did it come by this post?"

"It did."

"Show it to me at once. You won't? Then I was right; it is something you are ashamed of. Don't answer me. I know it. What is it about? Oh, you can't tell me—can't you? Has it anything to do with a woman?"

"It has."

"You wretch. I'll never speak to you again—never. I'll never forgive you as long as I live—no, I won't—not if you went on your knees to me. And I am a miserable woman."

Here my wife applied her handkerchief to her big brown eyes in a most becoming way, her initials worked in silk facing outwards. She squeezed out a few tears, of course. It does not require an artesian bore to raise tears to a woman's eyes; the moisture lies close to the surface, like the spring-level in a water-logged country.

"Don't cry, dear," I said, putting my hand on her shoulder. "Put on your things, and come to tennis."

"Will—you—show—me—the letter?" she jerked out in little sobs.

"I can't do th—"

"Then don't speak to me; go to tennis and leave your unfortunate, miserable, badly-treated wife at home."

I went into my office and lighted a pipe. I like tobacco when I am troubled. I then opened *Lothair*, which I was reading at the time, and my eyes met this passage: "Nothing in life is more remarkable than the unnecessary anxiety which we endure, and generally occasion ourselves." I read no further, and went back to my wife. I stipulated that if she would come

to tennis, I would show her the letter and tell her all about it within ten days. She agreed, and the next moment she was curling her hair before her glass and humming a waltz, as if she had not a sorrow in the world. While she was so occupied I fired off a reply to Treacle and Company, telling them to despatch the nearest thing to my choice, regardless of cost, and without delay.

In four or five days at the most I calculated I should get that bottle, and I used to contrive to waylay the *chaprasi* bringing the *dilk* by the Bombay mail. But four, five, six days passed; I received no reply, nor package, and began to be uneasy. On the seventh day, I lost my presence of mind and sent off a telegram "Scent bottle not received: send immediately." This blood-letting relieved me, and I drove off to tennis with a lighter heart. My wife was not going out that afternoon. We had some friends dining with us in the evening, and she was busily concocting a sweet thing in silks, flowers, and candied fruits, as a centre-piece. Unfortunately that ass of a *chaprasi* took the telegram receipt to her in my absence.

When I returned, flushed with exercise, and as jolly as a sand-boy, I found my wife glittering and radiant in full toilette in the brightly-lighted drawing-room. But I could see with half an eye that something had gone wrong. Her face was as hard as the diamonds which were flashing light from her engagement ring, and she had a don't-touch-me-stand-off-sir air about her.

"You have sent a telegram to Bombay," she said with compressed lips.

"Did I?" I could only mutter out.

"Did you?" she replied with treble-distilled accents of scorn. "Here, take the receipt of your telegram to—that—CREATURE." And my wife sailed out of the room, flinging the slip of paper at me as a parting shot, and leaving a trail of kananga water scenting the air where she had passed.

I went off in silence to change my flannels. My wife said afterwards I used a word beginning with a big D ; but I did not know it, and it was not like me, and, besides, I urge that she was not in a condition to know what I or anyone else was saying. That dinner went off somehow or other. I did not contribute much to the amusement, because my conversational powers had altogether deserted me, but my wife chatted and laughed, and listened and purred, as if life were all champagne and crackers. The "Creature" at Bombay seemed to sit much more lightly on her conscience than that infernal smelling-bottle did on mine. It was only with the departure of the last guest that her demeanour changed, and then, in answer to my appealing look, she gave me a contemptuous stare as if she placed me in the same category as the bearer come to put out the lights.

The climax was reached next day when Treacle and Company's reply telegram was brought to me as we sat at tiffin. The message said—"Bottle despatched on thirteenth : should reach you this afternoon." This, *per se*, was good news enough, but I felt my wife was looking at me, and although I calmly pocketed the telegram and went on with my lunch, I was not quite happy.

"Well," said my wife so icily, that she made me shiver down the back, "whom is the telegram from?"

"From Bombay," I replied mischievously, as I helped myself to some cold remains of last night's dinner. My wife burst into tears and left the table. I know she must have felt bad because she left her pâté de foie gras in aspic, which she is so fond of. And it gave me quite a shock afterwards when I found she had bolted herself into her dressing-room.

"Come and finish your tiffin, dear," I murmured persuasively through a slit in the door.

"Don't, dear me," she replied snappishly, "and go and telegraph to Bombay."

I was quite relieved to hear her voice, and returned to my lunch, saying by way of grace—"Thank Heaven, the drama is nearly played out."

I could have embraced the *chaprasi* when he brought the post that afternoon. Disregarding letters and all else, I pounced upon the welcome packet, and then sat down to write a note.

"Darling wife," I said, "this is a little smelling-bottle I have bought for you. I hope you will like it. This is all the secret and you are the only woman it concerned." To the note and packet I attached the letter and telegram as vouchers, and as I started for tennis, gave them to the bearer to deliver.

My wife arrived later on. I was hard all in a set when she came, but as she passed me she smiled and said: "You are a goose, Hubby." I knew it was all right then.

I have heard that a woman never calls a man a goose unless she is in love with him. I swiped the next ball served to me into the next district, in pure light-heartedness.

That night I had some writing to do and stopped up late. When I went to bed my wife had long been fast asleep; and like a child with a new toy, she was holding the scent-bottle fast in her little hand. This was my first and last secret.



A SEAL LAYING.

VIII.

A SEA-LAWYER.

Dame, thy tongue is sharp and acrid,
Yet I bear the smart.

A. F. Gordon.

I WISH my wife were not such a sea-lawyer. Some people happily do not understand what this term means, and I am bad at definition ; but I recollect reading that a Brooklyn boy, when called upon to explain the word "Quaker," wrote : " A Quaker is one of a sect who never quarrel, never get into a fight, never claw each other and never jaw back. Pa's a Quaker, Ma aint " I imagine a sea-lawyer and the Brooklyn boy's idea of a Quaker to be antitheses.

I repeat, I wish my wife were not such a sea-lawyer. It is all very well having a friendly argument now and again ; but to be confronted with a discussion at every possible twist and turn of one's life is altogether too wearing to the constitution. * I can't stand it. I am losing weight in a way that my medical adviser threatens to send me on sick leave, for which I am at present unprepared.

I positively cannot say a word to my wife but she makes it the standpoint for a discussion. I don't care how trivial, or how apparently incontrovertible the remark may be, but she is on the *alteram partem* tack at once. She is like the Irishman who could not say exactly what his politics were, but he knew he was "agin the Governmint." I was going to the Emerald Isle for another metaphor, and to say that she is like the Irishman's pig ; but unfortunately a woman's intellect is astuter than a pig's. It is no manner of use driving her the wrong way with the view of making her bolt for the right. That may be safe enough in

the case of a pig ; but a woman has a knack of divining the path you wish her to travel, and if you attempt to deceive her, as likely as not she will laugh in her sleeve, and be galloping down the wrong road before you know where you are.

If I happen to say I will work at home, she replies that a man in the house all day is a positive nuisance. If I declare for office, she says it is shameful and cruel the way I neglect her. When I return from work she indents on me for news, as if I were in the scandal and gossip department. If I come back worried and fagged, longing for quietness and a cup of tea sweetened with sympathy, I am informed I have first to pitch into the *dhobi*. If I speak to the man calmly in cold blood, she compares me to Balaam when he was employed to curse Israel. If I work myself up into a state of wrath, she says I am forgetting myself, and asks whether I would treat an English servant in that way. In any case she usually ends by taking the part of the servant, and then the two fall on me and rend me.

For the sake of peace and quietness I would often, and willingly, sink my own individuality if could only discover her's. But there's the rub. She is like the wind in April; some times on this side, and sometimes on that, and the wretched weather vane never knows which way to look. I believe there was a German chap of the name of Goethe who said : " Allein ein Weib bleibt stät auf einem Sinn den sie gefazt. Du rechnest sicherer auf sie im guten wie im Bösen." One would think that Goethe had been lucky in his experiences, but I am told he had a terrible wife. I expect she made him allow her to edit what he wrote.

It is just the same with my wife's moods. If I feel dreamy and sentimental, she is immediately as "unromantic as a Monday morning." If I attempt to meet her views and be practical she is all poetry and ether at once. For example, the other day my wife tucked up her sleeves for what she calls a "spring cleaning." When my wife tucks up her sleeves it is equivalent.

to the Baron calling for his boots. A spring cleaning is one of the ways in which a woman reminds a man that he is no longer a bachelor. It means bringing to the front the old things one does not want, and hiding the articles in daily use. It means sweeping up the dust from all the corners and crevices, where it had lain quiet and inert, and diffusing it in the air, whence it slowly descends and deposits itself in a layer on everything in the room. Then, day after day, when the things are dusted—that is, smacked and wiped—the dust gradually retreats to its old quiet haunts, and just as one begins to feel happy again, up go the sleeves for another cleaning. However, of course, if the wife says there is to be a spring cleaning, why, it has to be, and the best thing for a man to do is to clap on his hat and clear off the premises.

On this particular morning, knowing that my wife would be "on the rampage" all day, like Mrs. Joe Gargery, I thought an affectionate farewell might not be amiss, so I put my arm round her waist, with a Romeo-like air, and said: "Parting is such—"

"Bosh," she said. "Don't Shakespeare me when I am busy."

This wasn't encouraging, and I was just thinking what I should give her out of "Taming of the Shrew," when she said: "Look here, are you going to stop fooling, or are you not?"

I dropped her like a hot potato and left. I believe she did give me a kiss before I started, but it was one of those insipid, flavourless, veal-without-bacony, weevil-eaten-biscuity kisses like a sister's salutation. A sort of kiss you might expect from an old maiden aunt who had not tipped you, with about as much affection in it as there is meat in an empty egg-shell.

All that day at office I studied a thoroughly practical demeanour. I thought of old Mrs. General with her "papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prism, prunes and prism;" and I invented a formula of my own: "Bosh, golly bunkum gammon and spinach, gammon and spinach." A formula of this sort soon drives romance and all that nonsense out of a man's head.

When I returned the house was full of an all-pervading sense of snuff. The dust had travelled all the way up to the ceiling, and was on its return journey. It was then about the height of a man's face, and one had either to stand up on a chair or lie down on the ground to be free of it. My wife, with a complacent smile of duty performed, was lounging in any easy chair in a new tea-gown. She was occupied in sipping her orange pekoe and turning over the leaves of a book. I learnt afterwards it was Mrs. Hemans's poems, but I thought at the time it was Mrs. Beeton. I was just going to open with my formula when she held up her hand to stop me. "Listen to this," she said.

"No more! a harp string's deep, sad, broken"—

"Garbage, madam," I replied; "garbage."

She looked at me reproachfully, and continued

"A last low summer breeze, a sad—"

"Scissors! I exclaimed. "Gammon and spinach!!!"

She looked at me and then at the ceiling. Then she shut her eyes, and took a deep inspiration. She was going to let it out again in the form of a sigh, but the dust got into her throat, and she had a fit of coughing instead. I seized my opportunity and escaped. I saw a controversy in her eye, and did not feel equal to it.

Then there was the occasion when we passed Miss Scarlett, and I happened to remark that she was a very pretty girl. My wife sniffed, and looked a great deal, but said nothing. Now, if there is one thing as bad as an argument, it is a sniff. In one respect it is worse. In a discussion, when errors and misstatements and misrepresentations are made, it may be possible to seize on them, and crush them so that they may be harmless; but what can one do with a sniff; as Paley asks, "who can refute a sneer?"

I asked my wife to explain, and she wanted to know how any man with eyes in his head could possibly call Miss Scarlett

pretty with that hat on. Now, I did not say that Miss Scarlett's hat was good-looking ; I alluded to her face, and that I presume is the same, whatever the hat may be. But my wife will not admit that any woman can be handsome unless she is also fashionably and stylishly dressed. She must have a hat as flat as a pancake, a collar high enough to cut the back of her head off, and shoulders reaching to her ears. I told my wife she was like Cornelius O'Dowd's Oberland peasant, who on seeing a pretty girl, exclaimed : " How handsome she would be if she only had a goitre ! " She said she did not see the point of this. Of course not. She never can see the more subtle shades of rhetoric. Her logic is—" I say it is, there, sir ! " or " because it isn't so now." I call this intimidation, not polemics ; a form of argument " beculinium," and not " ad judicium."

The other day, when I was feeling a bit crushed—I won't say why—Horsey Hunter looked in to see me. He is a maniac on the subject of horses, but otherwise he is all there. " Tell you what it is, Brown," he said, " you remind me of a horse that is being badly ridden. You know the action of a nag that is accustomed to have his head hauled about. He scrabbles with his legs, wastes half his gallop in the air, and there is an anxious look in his eye as if he were everlastingly trying to peep round the corner to prepare for the next jerk on his mouth. When I marry it will be to a jock that knows her business, and not to one of your flash, stylish youngsters, fluttering in her first colours ; who thinks a smack of the whip and a job of the spur will get her all she wants. I mean a woman like Mrs. Jones.'

" Mrs. Jones ? "

" You are going to say Jones married a wife considerably his senior : I grant it ; and not particularly well-favoured ; I grant that too ; and people said ' Poor Jones ! ' when he married. I know it. But I don't see myself he is any subject for pity. He has a wife who believes in him, or who makes him think she believes in him, which is much the same thing in the end. A horse don't need to trouble himself about the good looks of his

rider. I see Jones passing along life's race-course with a low, free gallop ; no abuse of whip or spur there, but an easy, give-and-take hold of the reins, showing he is in good hands. I have seen you, my dear fellow, get more than one 'side-binder,' which has made you change step at a critical moment, and thrown you clean out of your stride."

"You seem to think everything depends on the jockey, and nothing on the horse."

"It is an old maxim in steeplechasing to back the man, not the horse. Life is not racing on the flat ; we all have jumps to negotiate. Can't you imagine yourself so hustled, and your head so interfered with, that you hit your shins against the top rail, or jump too short at the brook, and give both yourself and rider an ugly fall ? As you lie there, dazed and crumpled up, and hear yourself called a clumsy brute, watch Jones coming along. He is a headstrong, free-going fellow, and is sprawling a bit in the fallow. His rider takes a pull at him ever so gently, and he collects himself at once. Then a caress—not a smack—of the whip, and Jones with his legs well under him, shortens his stride a bit, and, flying the obstacle like a bird, is sailing safely away on the other side. Tell you what it is, John, there are riders who would make a rogue of any horse, and those who nurse their mounts, and get the utmost out of them. A sea-lawyer is generally a very tailor in the pig-skin. By-bye."



LADIES' WHIST.

IX

LADIES' WHIST.

Strange all this difference should be
'Twixt Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

—Swift

THIS hot weather our ladies were so few, their amusements so scanty, and the weather so exceedingly unpleasant, that we decorated them by making them honorary members of our whist and smoking-room. They liked this: not because they are particularly fond of a rubber, still less, of course, because they smoke, but because there is a twang of vice in it. I feel sure that this is the reason ladies so much appreciate a dinner or a supper at club or mess. They are like the old gardener, to whom the parson observed that he had seen him at church last Sunday, and who replied that he felt he were a doin' wrong all the time. They have a sort of suspicion they are doing wrong, and they like it. This is a woman all over.

Personally, I am not quite sure whether this procedure, on our part, were wise. If a henpecked man cannot find refuge in a smoking-room, what chance has he of running to earth when hard pressed? I mentioned this to Carraway the other day, and he pooh-poohed the idea. Carraway always likes to make out he is master in his own house. But if the truth were told, I believe he is not a bit stronger-minded than I am and fully as henpecked.

There is besides something incongruous in a woman playing whist (shade of Mrs. Battle forgive me!). I am always reminded of what old Sam Johnson said when asked

what he thought of women's preaching. He said that it was like a dog walking on its hind legs ; it was not done well, but the wonder was that it was done at all. The fact is, I have never met a Mrs. Battle. Ladies, I have found, may like a clear fire, and a clean hearth, but the rigour of the game—never. I once exacted the penalty for leading out of turn when my wife was at the table, and she told me I was no gentleman, and a good deal more besides that I don't care to repeat. I think there is no doubt that ladies do not appreciate a good "cut-and-thrust" fight, such as Sarah Battle enjoyed. They consider a "thorough-paced partner" and a "determined enemy," players who give and take no concessions, nothing more nor less than boors.

Of lady-players there are, however, two entirely distinct classes. In the first I include those who play the pure, unadulterated *bumble puppy*. As Elia said, they do not play at cards, but play at playing at them. The airy young gentleman of a literary turn, who so disgusted Mrs. Battle, would doubtless meet with their entire approval. They look upon a game as a game ; and as a game, consider bumble puppy a much finer diversion than whist. No one can blame them: only what I say is "*ne sutor ultra crepidam*," and let the last be "spoof," or some other kindred amusement. Now "spoof" is essentially a ladies' game, and one that they can talk and laugh and squabble and cheat and make merry over to their hearts' content. I hope I may not be misunderstood. I am far from intending to convey any disparagement of a woman's intellect. I daresay if four such ladies met at whist, they would thrust and parry quite in accord with Mrs. Battle's unconciliatory spirit, but mixed up with men they like to toy and trifle with the cards. To use a sporting phrase, they won't extend themselves, but just lark about, and kick their heels like mustangs on a prairie.

The other class of players I have alluded to is more intractable and difficult to deal with. If these ladies would

only play either whist or bumble puppy, one would know one's bearings, but there's the difficulty. They are like those people who, with regard to a certain point in theology, consider they are not *quite* good enough for heaven, but *far* too good for—well, the other place. They regard themselves not quite up to the form of rigorous whist, but too good, *much* too good, for bumble puppy. Our cousin Agnes is of this class. She knows as much about whist as I do about the ways and means of keeping a fringe in curl during the rains. Yet she turned up her nose when Captain Bunkum and young Biffin asked her to join in a rubber. She knew they were not renowned players, and said she did not care to play unless it was with Colonel Clay-Drayson and Professor Pole-Cavendish.

My wife is also of this class. She said she couldn't understand why I objected to play with her when the Professor had complimented her so highly upon her game. Now the Professor is as truthful a man as he is a fine whist player, and I thought I would inquire into the facts of this compliment. I asked him pointblank what he had been telling my wife. He said: "Mrs. Brown commenced by asking me—'What is a *coup*?' "

"A *coup*," I said, "is a violation of whist principle."

"Is that all?" she interrupted.

"I am sorry to say, my dear madam," I replied, "it is *not* all, otherwise you would make a *coup* at every fall of the cards. I was going to add—"

"Never mind that," she said, "I quite understand. And what is a *grand coup*?"

"The *grand coup*," I explained, "is throwing away a superfluous trump."

"'Ah,' she said, 'I see.' And then she commenced trumping my aces and winning cards as if she thought a

grand coup were the simplest thing in the world. It was dreadful, but I am glad your wife was pleased. Good-bye."

There is no doubt ladies love coups. They like to fly off to the intricacies of the game before they have mastered its A B C. Mrs. Shamrock, of our station, has invented a coup of her own, which now goes by her name. This is how she does it.

Shamrock and his wife, we will say, are playing Carraway and Mrs. Carraway. As a rule, we play with our wives as partners to acquire an interest in the game; otherwise we might as well play for love. Mrs. Shamrock has Mrs. Carraway as her right hand adversary. Mrs. Carraway often plays a wrong card, and wants to take it up again; she is probably thinking of her baby at the time. Carraway leads the three of clubs, Shamrock plays the five, Mrs. Carraway lays down the seven, and then asks whether she may take it up again. Mrs. Shamrock asks what card she would like to play.

"The queen, dear, may I?"

"Very well, dear, play the queen."

The seven is replaced by the queen, Mrs. Shamrock covers with the king, and sweetly adds the trick to her pile. This coup may lose something in the telling, but it is a treat to see Mrs. Shamrock carry it into effect, in her pretty innocent manner. It is a very neat piece of play and most effective at times. We call it the "Shamrock coup."

It may be thought that such a coup would be impossible except in the case of a lady of Mrs. Carraway's frank and open character. But the fact is, that nine ladies out of ten are confidential whist players. You have only to talk to them long enough, and they will tell you exactly what they have in their hand. On one occasion, when I observed my wife smiling loudly as she sorted her cards, I remarked "I see, dear, you have a good hand; I feel sure you have all four honours."

"You are wrong again, then," she said. "I have only three of them." One more question, and she would have told me what the three were, but I am an honourable man, and scorn to take advantage of a woman's candour.

At the same time this is a point which I cannot understand. Why should a lady who with regard to her feeling is as opaque as the Red Sea be at whist as transparent as the water of an inland lake, through which you can see the pebbles glittering at the bottom and the grasses waving time to the ripples, and the fishes moving themselves along in jerks. Now a woman may be passionately in love with a man and behave as if she detested him: or she may positively dislike an acquaintance of her own sex, and yet be as sweet to her as maple sugar. This is active deceit, and not exactly what we require at whist; but she can be also as passively impenetrable as the Sphinx, as I myself know from experience. When I proposed to my wife I had not the faintest idea whether she was going to accept me or not. If I had only known that it was a case of "open-your-mouth-and-shut-your-eyes," and behold a lollipop tickling your palate, I should have popped the question like a man, instead of stammering like an ass. Carraway says he wasn't a bit frightened when he proposed. I don't believe him.

The professor, who always regards the world from a whist point of view, once said: "The difference between a man and a woman is that when the former makes a revoke and you tax him with it, he wears a hang-dog expression of face, which cannot be mistaken. He is tongue-tied and ashamed; or if he speak at all, he will apologise profusely to his partner. A woman, on the other hand, will invariably deny the accusation."

There is much truth in this. In the salad days of my married life I once charged my wife with a revoke. She hotly denied it. I pulled out the trick, and showed her the very card she played. "What?" she said, "*that* seven of

spades,—why you played it *yourself*, it is your *own* revoke.” If there be two ladies in the game, they will support each other strongly, even if they be adversaries. Women have a much stronger *esprit de corps* than men. It then comes to two women’s word against two men’s. Of course the men have to give in. A man who accuses a lady of a revoke will probably end by wishing he had never been born.

Believe me, if a man be obliged to play whist with ladies, it is much better that he should sit tight and grin, and bear it like a man. After all, ladies’ whist is not a bit worse than an attack of colic. In fact, it is decidedly like colic, because the pain is intermittent, and very severe while it lasts. I have known ladies play a couple of rounds in an unimpeachable manner, the discomfort of the game has ceased altogether and just as you have forgotten all about your complaint, down comes a card like a spasm that just doubles you up, and makes you bit your tongue to keep from shrieking.

Talking of revokes, I remember, as a boy being greatly impressed by an incident which was told us by a friend of my father’s. My father was himself a very fine whist player. He was a bit old fashioned perhaps, and he had certainly never read the eighteenth edition of Cavendish, but in his own style he was very hard to beat. Consequently when he admitted his inferiority to his friend, Tenace, we knew the latter must be a player of superlative excellence. One evening, when Mr. Tenace and my father were cracking a bottle of port, and I was privileged to be present, my father laughingly chaffed his friend on some refusal of his to join in a ladies’ game. “Well, General,” said Mr. Tenace, “I once made a vow I would never play whist again with a lady, and I have religiously kept it.” “Tell us about it,” said my father. “It was this way,” he said: “I was at an hotel on the Continent, and one night sat down to play with two men (chance acquaintances) and a lady. The man who happened to cut the lady as his partner accepted her responsibilities. Our

stakes where high, and at the close of the play I rose a considerable loser. It so happened that I had lost the same amount to each of the men. As we were preparing to depart they offered me a last rubber, double or quits. I accepted the chance. The lady was my partner. The score was one game all, and in the third game we were four up and six tricks: we wanted one more trick to win both the game and the rubber. The game was certain. Trumps were out, it was my lead, and I was able to lead a suit of which my partner held the winning card. When it came to her turn to play, she hesitated....Her hesitation seemed interminable, perhaps because my nerves were excited. The lights in the room were becoming pale and dim, because the day was breaking, and the rays of another dawn were forcing their way into the hot, close room. There was something uncanny in the light . . . The more she hesitated the more anxious I became. I shivered down the back, as if a stream of cold water were trickling down it. Beads of perspiration stood on my forehead . . . good gracious, I thought to myself, what can she be thinking of. She has only one card of the suit to play. There was only one way in which the game could be lost, and that was by a revoke—she revoked!"

X.

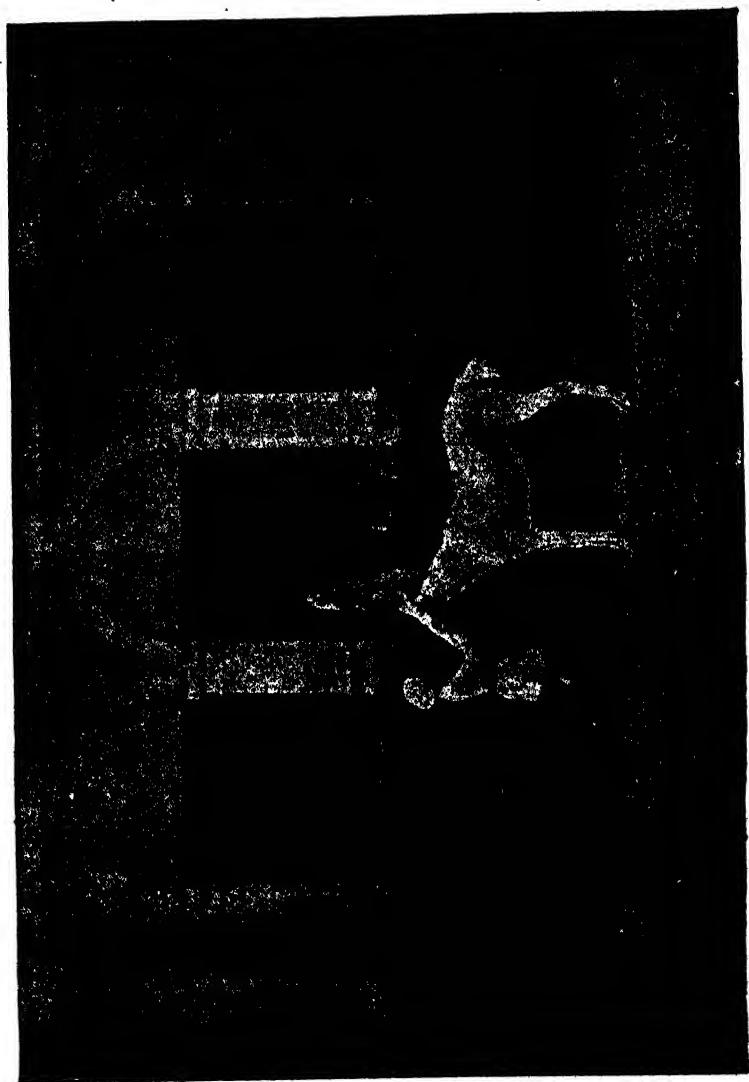
MY WIFE'S HONOUR.

What is that word honour ?

—*Henry IV.*

NO, I can't understand it. I was talking it over with Robinson of my service only the other night, while we were smoking our cheroots after dinner, and our wives were in the next room chattering like a couple of blue jays. We were talking low ; we were not particularly anxious that our wives should hear us ; but we could hear what they were saying, and some extraordinary confidences they made. Robinson said his experiences were precisely the same as mine, and I repeat I can't understand it.

Now, there was that business of my mare Spider. Spider was as good a little bit of stuff as ever looked through a bridle ; handsome as they make them, perfect in action, temper and manners, fast and young ; *but*—and where is the horse that has not a *but*—she was addicted to “staggers.” She had a way of toppling on to her head, without a moment's warning, possibly when she was going at full speed ; and it was an unpleasant habit. The first time she brought me down, she gave me a black eye, and took a piece out of my nose. The circumstances too were unfortunate. I was returning from guest night at mess about three in the morning, and my wife seemed inclined to doubt my story. The second time she knocked one of my front teeth down my throat, and the charge the dentist made for replacing it gave *me* the staggers. I know where dentists will go to when they die, as they say. My wife is a bit of a housekeeper, and she said :—
“Look here, Hubby, you must just get rid of that mare. I



MY WIFE'S HONOUR.

can't afford any more teeth for you." I quite agreed with her. I am not a nervous man, but I must admit that Spider was beginning to take the edge off my courage. •

One morning I showed the mare to Smith, who fancies himself about horses. He felt her legs, looked at her teeth, viewed her front-ways, and side-ways, and back-ways, walked her, trotted her, cantered her—and submitted her, in short, to a most searching examination. Now, I have no pity for a man of this sort. If a fellow throws himself on my mercy, and says "I know nothing about a horse, tell me all about it," my conscience won't allow me to hold my tongue; but when a man like Smith ignores me altogether, asks me to stand aside, and goes prodding my horse about, I allow him to work his own way, and lie quiet. Now, Smith could not find anything wrong with that mare. He was not likely to: staggers does not necessarily show itself in any unkind, outward form. If you suspect a horse of staggers, examine its owner—not the horse itself. If Smith had looked at *my* teeth, and examined *my* nose, he might have discovered something, but the mare was right enough. The more he looked at her, the more he liked her—I could see it in his eye. "What's her figure?" he said at last, with his eyes still fixed on her. "Four hundred," I replied, in the tone of a man who is making an alarming sacrifice. He was just going to say he would take her, when, as bad luck would have it, my wife came into the verandah.

I pause, as indeed I might. To this day the recollection of that little incident makes me sick. My wife, looking at the mare, walked to the edge of the verandah, shading the sun from her big eyes with her hand, and remarked innocently: "What a pity it is!"

"What's a pity?" says Smith.

"Why, that Spider has the staggers. Hasn't my husband told you? That's the reason we are selling her."

"Oho!" says Smith, giving me an ugly look. "Stagers, has she? I don't think I will take her then. Good morning."

I turned on the partner of my life,—"What on earth did you blurt out that for?" I asked. "Smith would have bought her, if you had only held your tongue. I shall never sell her at all now."

"But, husband," she replied, opening her dear eyes very wide, "you don't mean to say you would have sold her without explaining——."

"Bah!" I shall never sell her *with* explaining," I retorted savagely; and the end of it was that the mare was auctioned in the bazar for a hundred and fifty.

Then there was my horse Peter. Peter was a very decent all-round nag in his way, but once in three months or so he used to become demented, and if he happened to be in harness at the time, heaven help the trap and its occupants. He had kicked himself out of my Norfolk cart for about the third time, when I decided to sell him. James of our station wanted a trapper, and had always fancied Peter: he liked his colour, he said. There is no accounting for tastes. Peter was a ginger-coloured chestnut—a colour I abhor: it is so often a concomitant of bad temper. But James, who is dark, had just married a wife with red hair—we called them *rouge et noir*—perhaps he liked Peter for this reason. I was circumspect on this occasion, and took advantage of my wife being out calling to ask James to come over and inspect the horse. He did; and not only decided to buy him, but insisted on driving him back to his house then and there. This was safe enough. Peter had one of his outbreaks only a few days previously, and there was no chance of another for a couple of months at least. I thought I had done the trick that time and was altogether unprepared for the crushing luck that followed. It so happened that when James arrived home

he found my wife there, calling on his. He told them gleefully about his purchase; and my wife very pleasantly explained that when Peter put back his ears, and began to look with an evil eye round the corner, it would be advisable for Mr. James to keep the horse from getting his head down, while Mrs. James clambered out at the back with all possible despatch. The immediate result of this explanation was the return of Peter with a note from James, the tone of which I decidedly objected to. He asked me if I deliberately intended to murder his wife. I had naturally no such intention. I am a humane man, as men go, but obviously I preferred that Peter should kick his wife, rather than mine. I see nothing extraordinary in this.

"So you have been and done it again," I said to my wife, when she returned home. "I do wish you could learn to hold that tongue of yours a bit."

"Why, Jack," she said, "you wouldn't sell a brute like that without warning people—would you? It would not be right." I shrugged my shoulders. "I only know," I said, "that Tomkins, whom I nursed for typhoid as if he had been my own brother, sold *me* the horse without a word of warning. But then," I added maliciously, "Tomkins is a happy bachelor, and has no wife to go blabbing his secrets—lucky fellow!" My wife began to cry, and I had to promise her a diamond and sapphire ring which she had taken a fancy to, before she would consent to forgive me and be comforted. Consequently Peter could hardly be said to be a financial success.

Then there was that business of the drawing-room chair. The chair was a handsome one, but it was shaky on its pins, like a big, handsome horse with a good barrel, but no legs to stand upon. It had broken down and been blistered and patched up half-a-dozen times; after which it was a rule in the house that no one should sit upon it. When we were going on leave, we sold the chair to the Bloffses, and I

fervently hoped that it would be tenderly treated till we were safe on blue water. But I have no luck. Bloffs is a big, heavy man, and suffers from sciatica. When he gets a nasty twinge on and flops into a chair, it is something to remember. Our dear old chair, in spite of its unsound legs, was a fine, substantial, roomy-looking article of furniture; and one day old Bloffs, with a yell of agony, dropped heavily into it, in a most fearless manner. The arm-chair was not accustomed to this style of treatment, and its legs gave way just as if they had been made of biscuit china. The crash, as Mrs. Bloffs afterwards told my wife, simply shook the house, and Bloffs' curses were something awful. I don't see that this was any concern of ours, but, would you believe it, my wife wrote a letter of apology, returned the money, and took the chair back. It sold afterwards at our auction, with a job lot of old sola topees, toys, and other odds and ends, for four annas six pices.

I think I have said enough to show that my wife has a very nice sense of honour, but wait a bit and *audi alteram partem*. I can't understand why a woman, possessed in other respects of a very correct tone of morals, should be so grossly *immoral* when it becomes a question of Government property. In other matters my wife's purity of feeling positively puts me to the blush. I feel I am not good enough for so immaculate a creature; but when the question of *meum* and *tuum* with regard to our relationship with Government comes in, we reverse our positions,—she becomes the sinner, and I am morally as white as snow. It is only yesterday, when I was up to my eyes in work, that my wife came into my office and began fiddling with the papers on my table. "Don't do that," I said. "What do you want?"

"Oh, I want some clean paper," she replied, "for a cake; and this will do capitally," she added, as she appropriated a few quires of Government foolscap.

"But my dear, my *dear*," I expostulated, "that is Government paper, you must not use that."

"Bother the dirty Government," she said, making off with her spoils. "There you are working your fingers to the bone, for Government, night and day, and neglecting your wife, and if I mayn't take a scrap of paper in return—I *will* take it, *there*, and you can report me if you like."

"But look here," I urged, "some one will be seeing the coat-of-arms in the corner, and I shall get into such a row."

"Oh, then, I will only take the other side," she replied, and she forthwith tore the sheets in halves, placing the armorial lot on my table and making off with the rest. "What I don't want for the cake," she said, "will come in nicely for the kippered herrings at breakfast."

In ten minutes she was in again. She wanted this time to send a parcel Home; and in almost less time than it takes to write it, she had wrapped it up in Government *mom jama*, the *chaprasi* had sewn it up with Government thread, and the *babu* had sealed it all over with Government sealing-wax. "My dear," I said, at last, when I found my tongue, "this is not right, it is not indeed."

"What's not right?"

"Why, to use these Government materials for your private parcels."

"Stuff and nonsense," she said, "as if Government with all its money could not spare me a penny worth of sealing-wax. What nonsense you talk! I should like to know what's the use of being in Government employment if I am not allowed to take your *mom jama*. Tell me that." I dried up. It is not a bit of good remonstrating with my wife; she will go on arguing till Doomsday, unless she is allowed to have the last word. Shamrock, of our station, says if you want to teach a woman these things, you must begin early. He commenced on his little daughter when she was about twelve months old. You have only to say *sarkari* to her now, and she drops anything she has hold of like a hot potato. The

all-round morality of this young woman is likely to be very high.

My wife has also no silly squeamishness in the matter of "Travelling Allowance." I remember one morning as I was mounting my dog-cart, she asked where I was going. I told her, and she said she would like to come too. "Come along, then," I replied, and we started. I had seen the object of my journey, and was about to turn the horse when she said, "I suppose you will get travelling allowance for this morning's drive, won't you?"

"Well, no," I replied. "We have only been four-and-a-half miles out; we are half a mile short of travelling allowance distance."

"Then drive on another half-a-mile."

"But I have nothing to see on ahead."

"What nonsense! Do you really mean to say you were going to give up five rupees for the sake of half-a-mile? I have no patience with you. Go on at once."

I went on, I admit. I know that when my wife puts those pretty lips of hers together, it is politic to obey; and although I was mulish enough not to charge for the journey in my journal, my wife thinks, to this day, she put five rupees into my pocket that morning. I remember, too, coming in once from a long, hot, dusty ride, and shouting as I entered for a drink and the punkha. My wife brought me the drink, and I applied my lips at once. I could not stop to thank her, but my eyes over the rim of the glass told her what I thought.

"Been Tar?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," I said, when I had drained the tumbler to the dregs, "about nineteen miles."

"Nineteen miles!" she exclaimed. "Do you actually mean to tell me you have been foolish enough to ride nineteen

miles for five rupees, when you might have gone one mile more and earned ten? I beg you will never be so stupid again." I had to promise to reform in future. It may be thought that I am a weak man; but the fact is that, like Samuel Pepys, my head "akes mightily" after a dispute. Besides, in an argument, I always find that we have no common starting point. My wife is like a madman: she argues correctly on false premises.

Then there was that Boulger incident. Boulger has the reputation of being a man who is not to be trifled with; yet my wife wound him round her finger as if he had been a piece of darning cotton. Boulger is my departmental superior, and as crabbed an old chap as ever lived. He came to see me one day about some work he appeared to imagine had been unreasonably delayed. He found my explanations difficult to find fault with; I am not a fool like Robinson, who, when he had put up a rain gauge, erected a thatch shelter over it to protect it from the weather. Still, there was Boulger dying to discover an excuse to show temper. At last, he chanced to see one of the *burkundases* walking up and down a side verandah, on guard, shaking up the butter bottle as he went. His wicked little eyes gave a gleam of triumph, and he smiled sarcastically with his big, fat lips, as he said:

"Brown, do you usually employ your Government *burkundases* for butter-making?"

I don't know what I should have said; probably I should have made a mess of it—I always do feel a bit nervous before Boulger; but just as he spoke my little wife came in with an empty inkstand, on the hunt for Government ink. She heard his remark, and replied without hesitation. "No, we do not employ the *burkundases* for making butter, but as the man *has* to walk up and down, he may just as well shake the bottle too. It does not interfere with his duties, does it Mr. Boulger?" And my wife looked up at him in that winning

way of hers, so that Boulger smiled too, and said : " Certainly not ; certainly not." It would take a better man than Boulger to withstand the battery of my wife's eyes. Then she took him in to tiffin, and gave him a well-served little meal, with a bottle of Chateau Lafite of 1875, that I am only allowed to have on wedding days and high holidays. The wine was a present to us, and would warm the heart of any man, even the heart of a Boulger : and as he went away, he passed the *chaprasi* in the front verandah hemming *jharans* ; and my wife said : " The *chaprasis* are idle half the day : don't you think it is as well to make them useful, Mr. Boulger ? " He smiled again, as he said good-bye, and remarked : " Of course, of course, a very good thing indeed." Then he drove off, and my wife shook her little fist at his broad back, saying : " What a brute to make a remark like that about the *burkundaz* ! What on earth does it matter to the dirty Government whether he shakes a butter-bottle or not ? " I looked at her wonderingly and kissed her.

I have been married some time, but don't understand a woman yet. I begin to think I never shall.



WIFE IN OFFICE.

XI.

WIFE IN OFFICE.

That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites.

—*Othello*.

I AM not naturally a timid man ; but I must confess that when my wife invades my office on epistolary views intent, I am beset with qualms of fear. For the life of me, I can't help it. I think it was the author of the *Dodd Family Abroad* who wrote : " Don't talk to me of pusillanimity and cowardice ! Nobody is brave with his wife. From the Queen of Sheba to the Duke of Marlborough, aye, and to our own days, history teaches us the same lesson. What chance have you with one that has been studying every weak point, and every frailty of your disposition, for, may be, twenty years. Why, you might as well box with your doctor, who knows where to plant the blow that will be the death of you." These remarks are pregnant with truth : nevertheless, by taking a pull at myself, I can often manage to show a bold front to the enemy on ordinary occasions ; but arm my wife with a pen and a piece of paper, and I am seized with a nameless terror, a sort of indefinable dread, such as, I understand, inflicts itself on some people when there is a cat in the room ; and I feel impelled to flee to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Now, there is no excuse for this invasion. I have amply equipped the house for the voluminous correspondence of its mistress. In the dining-room there is a handsome writing table ; at least it used to be handsome before the wife brought home a tin of black japan from the Sadar Bazar and japped it. However, there it is, as glossy as a raven ; and the black comes

off, as I know by experience, because I have already ruined two of my best suits. And there is an ebony-handled penholder on it, a good solid inkstand with a jet top, and several blank account books. If my wife is not an able accountant, it is not for want of material. In the drawing-room there is a tempting little *escritoire*, enamelled hedge-sparrow green No. 2. It is furnished with a jade-handled pen, a gorgeous inkstand, crested paper of all tints, and a blotting book of many colours. The turn-out is calculated to give any woman a *furor scribendi*; but when it comes to a matter of business, my wife will have none of these. She makes for my poor ink-bedabbled office as surely as a snipe rises up wind, and elbows me out of my official chair like a young cuckoo hoisting the young hedge-sparrows out of their rightful home. I wonder whether a woman has a conscience.

There is a sort of an idea that when Sir Isaac Newton said: "Ah! Diamond, Diamond, little thou knowest the mischief that thou hast done," he was speaking to his dog. I recollect myself having seen a picture of a little spaniel barking in the philosopher's face over the *débris* of his ruined papers. But I am convinced that Diamond was his wife: it was Lady Newton herself, and Sir Isaac made his memorable exclamation after she had been making hay in his office. He called her Diamond because she was so expensive. Just as some men call their wives "dear" or "treasure" or "pearl" (of great price). I knew a man whose wife had auburn hair; she was furious with him one day because she said he had called her "carrots." It took a lot of explanation and a present to persuade her that he had called her "carats," twenty-four carats, because she was like pure gold. Bachelors grow sentimental over these pet names; they imagine they are given by husbands out of the fulness of their hearts, instead out of the emptiness of their pockets. I admit it was very creditable of Newton, but what husband is there who has not been equally patient. It is no manner of use being angry with a creature who is as irresponsible as a tame jackdaw. The unfortunate side of it is, that sauce for

the goose is *not* sauce for the gander. When I happened to spill a drop or two of preserved ginger syrup over my wife's new centrepiece, she was not very patient with me, I assure you. That's the worst of women. "Nullo suo peccato impediantur, quo minus ulterius peccata demonstrare possint."

"Hubby ! get up and let me sit at your table for a bit."

"Certainly not ; go to your japan black."

"It's so sticky this warm weather, I shall spoil my frock."

"Well, go to your sparrow-green then."

Ah, Hubby don't be foolish and unreasonable. Fancy being cross because your wife wants your office table for half a minute. Get up ; I won't give you any peace if you don't. That's right ; now give me a pen ; see, I want to answer this invitation. Don't go away. Tell me shall I say 'My dear Mrs. Jones,' or Dear Mrs. Jones ? "

"My dear, I don't care twopence. Pompey and Cæsar are very much alike, especially Pompey."

"I shall say 'Dear' then, because she sent the invitation so late, and I hope she will notice it. I believe she only asked us because some one else refused. Now shall I say 'I have much pleasure in accepting,' or 'I shall have much pleasure' ? "

"I have much pleasure."

"I don't think you are right. I shall say 'I shall have much pleasure in accepting your kind invitation.' I like the way I write my 'shalls.' Now tell me how shall I end up ? "

"'Yours sincerely,' and look sharp about it."

"No, I don't mean that. I mean what remark shall I make to finish up with."

"Why should you make any remark at all ? When I write to Jones, I say 'Dear Jones,—Dine with me to-night ? Yours,' and he replies, 'Dear Brown, with pleasure. Yours.' What more do you want ? "

"Good gracious, what barbarous creatures men are ! Why a woman would be mortally offended if she received a letter

like that. There must always be some pleasant little remark to show there is no ill-feeling."

"Well, say you hope her tomato sauce turned out a success."

"A success! Haven't you heard? The recipe gave such a lot of red pepper that Mr. Jones says one small bottle will last them a lifetime, even if they both live to be a hundred. And what do you think? Mrs. Jones thought a maund and a chittack were the same thing, and she has made about twenty dozen large bottles full of sauce, of which you can only take about two drops at a time. You can't mention the word tomato in Mrs. Jones' hearing. Mr. Jones thinks he will have to change his name; every time his wife says 'Tom,' she bursts into tears. Think of something else."

"Say it's beastly hot. Thermometer 93."

"Never! She would be sure to say they keep their house down to 85."

"My dear, if you don't hatch one of your pleasant endings pretty soon, I won't go to this dinner at all."

"If you don't accept you have to write several nice remarks to soften the refusal; with an acceptance, one is sufficient. Oh, I know I shall say we passed her house this morning, and how pretty she has made her garden look."

"Her garden! Because she has half-a-dozen cracked flower pots on the door steps."

"Never mind. She calls it a garden. That will do very nicely; now I will copy it out."

I cannot say my wife writes *currente calamo*. I often think she would be admirably suited for a railway luggage booking clerk, because she is so fond of writing things in triplicate. There is the rough pencil copy, the amended ink copy, and the final fair copy, like a Paschal lamb without spot or blemish. I never knew an author take so much trouble with her proofs.

"Now, dear, have you finished?"

"Hubby! you *are* impatient. What do you mean by it? You are *positively, culpably* impatient. No, I have not half finished. See here, Mrs. Flummery has sent me over a new dress, which she says it too tight for her. She is sure it will suit me. Fancy her cheek, Hubby! *it has a twenty-four-inch waist.*"

"Dear me. Yes, it must be very tight."

"Tight! It's a sack. My waist is eighteen inches. Perhaps you don't know I take seventeens in corsets."

"Do you, now?"

"Of course, when they are new, I don't lace them up fully."

"No, I suppose not."

"They soon stretch though, even the best of them. Now what shall I say to this woman?"

"Say it's too big."

"Oh, but she would be so offended."

"Well, say it's too small."

"Then it would be over the whole station that her waist is smaller than mine. I shall send the dress back with a 'Bahut bahut salaam, piche jawab.' That would be safe, wouldn't it? Now don't fidget. It makes me quite irritable to see you walking up and down, as if you weren't happy, like the polar bear at the Zoo. Sit down at once. Look here, I want to send a money-order to Cashaway's for those gloves. 'Name and address of payee.' I suppose I am the payee, as I pay the money?"

"The payee is the person to whom the money is to be paid."

"Is it, then why isn't it said so, and who is the remitter, and what is the date, and is it necessary for me to write my name three times? I wish you would write it for me.... Ah, thank you, Hubby, you're a dear. Don't go yet. See I want

to send this parcel back to Wideawake and Laidlow; the things are all wrong."

"Of course they are wrong, otherwise what would be the advantage of the value-payable system? It makes them wideawake, and us laid-low. But what do you want to know about it."

"I want to know who the 'consignee' is."

I have said that I am certain Newton was a married man; I feel equally sure that all post-office officials and traffic managers of railways must be bachelors; otherwise why do they invent forms that no woman can understand. No woman understands *consignee* and *addressee* and *payee*. I used to think that it had something to do with the terminal double e; but this can't be it either, because even an embryo woman, a child hardly able to stand, knows what a gee-gee is.

"Now, Hubs, what are you cogitating for. Listen; I have dismissed that new *khitmatgar*; he wants a 'chit.' What shall I say?"

"Why did you dismiss him?"

"Oh, because he was so stupid, and so incorrigibly dirty."

"Then say so."

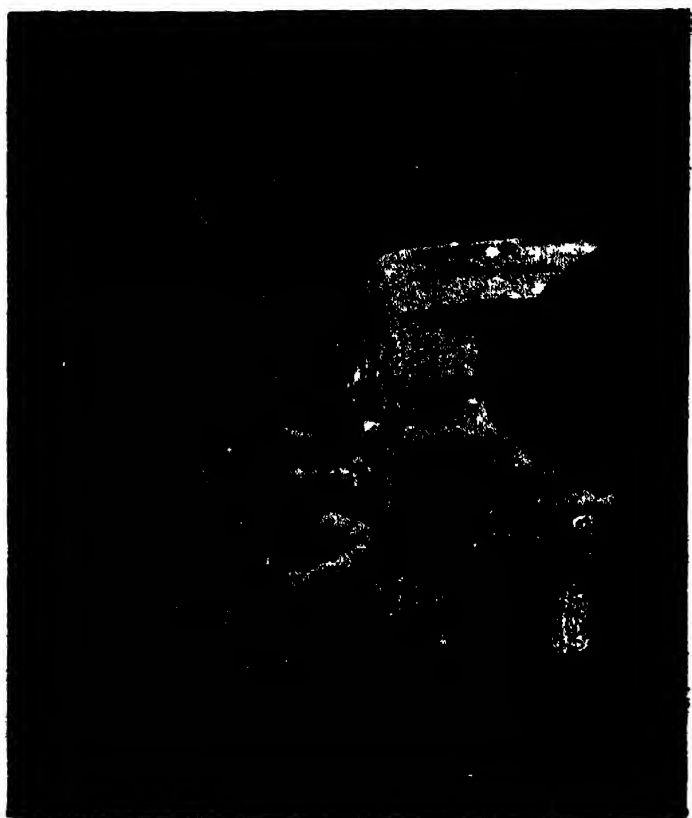
"Oh, no. The poor fellow would never get another place. I will say we had him five weeks, and found him very honest willing, and hard working." (The wife does not seem to think that "Louer tout c'est une autre façon de dénigrer tout.")

"Now, Hubby, shall I take my *hansamah's* accounts in here? No? Well, don't look so alarmed and go on with your work: you are very lazy this morning. Don't say I interrupted you, because I haven't. I don't suppose I have been in your office five minutes."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quit sure—perfectly sure."

I feel inclined to say of my wife as Lord Palmerston said of Macaulay:—"I wish I were only as sure of *one* thing as Tom Macaulay is, cock-sure of *everything*."



MOA

XII.

ONLY A WOMAN.

"Those have most power to hurt us that we love
We lay our sleeping lives within their arms."

A WOMAN is an unreasonable creature—upon my Sam, she is.

Now there's my wife. This morning as I was busily engaged in writing a report, which I trust will make a name for myself, she interrupted me by asking some fangdangle, incomprehensible question about her new green silk dress. I think she wanted to know whether she should have it trimmed with "passementerie" or "ruchings."

Regarding my reply, there is unfortunately a little difference of opinion. My wife is positive I told her to go to Jericho in an exceedingly brusque and hasty manner. My own opinion is that I very politely replied: "I am very busy now, dear; would you mind asking me later on?" In the absence of witnesses I am afraid this question will never be settled. However, the result is the same. My wife declared I *never* took *any* interest in *any* matter that pleased *her* that I *never* discussed little questions with her like *other* husbands did with *their* wives, and then she sat down on a lot of my papers and began to cry. Of course, I had to stop writing that report, and soothe her, and all that. Comforting my wife always means giving her something, generally an article of dress; consequently I can honestly say I strive to keep her from tears. I don't like to see her crying; it is too expensive, and I can't afford it. Now I don't call this fair. I don't ask my wife to give her opinion on guns and rifles. I don't expect her to advise me on the merits of

side levers and rebounding locks, and smokeless powder, and hollow bullets, and all the rest of it. I don't sit down and cry because she will not discuss these questions with me, and refuse to be comforted till she has promised me a jolly little '360 Holland and Holland, or a double '450 Henry Express. Then why should she? She replies: "You forget, dear, I am only a woman."

I fail to see the force of this argument. I don't forget at all. I never took her for a man. It is natural to suppose I wouldn't have married her if I had. At the same time, the argument always floors me. I feel myself something in the position of my terrier Tim. If a dog means fight, and cocks its tail, and growls, Tim is always ready to oblige him with a round or two. If a dog wags its tail, and frisks, and larks about, Tim knows this means an invitation to play, and he is always game for a romp. But when a dog screws its head round at an angle, puts back its ears, puckers up its mouth, and after a few sidelong turns flops down on the ground, with an apologetic air, as much as to say "I am only a woman," Tim never knows what to do. He simply looks a fool, and I can feel for him.

Now I *do* try and take an interest in my wife's dress; but as the only literature she reads consists of the *Queen*, the *Lady*, and the *Lady's Pictorial*, supplemented by price lists from Messrs. Whiteaway and Laidlaw, Francis and Ramsay, Francis, Harrison, and Hathaway, and goodness knows how many more, I feel she has me at a disadvantage. The other day, when she and Mrs. Flounce were chattering and gurgling over their tea, talking about *torchons*, and *plastrons*, and *torsades*, and *jabots*, and *vedingotes*, and Masson straw, and hedgehog straw, and Lord knows what else, I thought for a long time they were conversing in a foreign language. I doubt whether it is wise for a man to compete with a woman on such ground: he only makes an ass of himself.

For instance, one day my wife got a sudden inspiration and said: "Hubby! do you know I have a brilliant idea? That yellow silk dress of mine is old fashioned, but the material is as

good as new ; it is lovely silk. I'll just unpick it, and have it made up again. Now, what would you advice ? Shall I trim it with chiffon, or guipure, say."

This was a poser. I didn't know anything about chiffons or guipures, but at the same time I hardly liked to confess my ignorance.

"Now, then," said the wife, "why don't you answer ? What are you putting your head on one side for, and blinking like an owl in daylight ?"

"Well, my dear," I said with great deliberation, "it is not easy to decide ; but I think the *chiffon*—yes, the *chiffon*."

"Why ?"

Hang it all, I said to myself, this is getting unpleasant, and then in desperation I blurted out—"Why ? Why because I like the colour of it."

"Colour of it ? What next ? Why you stupid, chiffon can be of any colour—white, black, yellow, green——."

"Of course, of course. I meant *green* chiffon—a pretty mignonetty green mousseline chiffon." I had heard Mrs. Flounce use this expression, and I brought it out with great triumph. I expected that it would fetch my wife, and it did, but not in the way I thought.

"Horror !" she exclaimed. "*Green* chiffon with a yellow dress. What are you thinking of ?"

"No, no ; not with a *yellow* dress, of course."

"But we are talking about a yellow dress."

"Are we ? So we are ; well, in the case of a yellow dress I vote for the guipure."

"But why ?"

"How fond you are of asking questions. Because I like the look of those jolly little beads on it."

I thought my wife would have had a fit. "Beads?" she said—"beads on guipure? Are you mad? You're not. Oh, well" (assuming a despairing tone), "I give you up. When I married you I thought I had married a clever man. I am sure some one told me you were clever. You know nothing—positively nothing. A girl of ten would put you to the blush: you ought to go to school again, and begin your A B C. I am ashamed of you—I am indeed."

Now I should very much like to know if this is an encouragement for a man to talk about dress. I tried to discuss the subject honestly and seriously, and I failed. The next time I admit I was frivolous, but what is the good of trying to ascend (or descend—which is it?) to a woman's level, only to be snubbed, and jeered at, and sat upon, and compared to a girl of ten.

On this occasion we had just finished breakfast. My wife had, of course, a copy of the *Queen* handy. She turned to me and asked which I thought would be the prettier—a dress in "praline pink foulard" or in "tilleul crêpe de chine."

I wonder whether there is any man on the face of this earth (excluding the millinery profession, and Professor Huxley, who seems to know everything) who could answer that question. If so, I should like to kick him. However, I was not going to let myself in again. I said: "Oh, I am for the pralines. I was always partial to burnt almonds."

"I can't laugh at that," said the wife contemptuously; "there is nothing funny in it."

Then she turned over some more pages of that detestable paper, and presently broke out in rapture: "Listen to this—isn't it lovely? Isn't it altogether too sweet? Listen: 'Oyster grey woollen crêpon, embellished with silver braid which binds the Swiss belt, the short Zouave fronts, as well as the opening of the full bodice, a row of'—I hope you are listening—'a row of cabochons heads the galon, whilst others shine amongst the embroidery of the silk bib.' There——."

"Ah!" I said, smacking my lips. "Yes; that's something like it. What was it? Grey oysters with cabochons—(a sort of roll, no doubt—and a gallon—(of porter, of course). Scrumptious!"

"If you are going to be insulting," said the wife, turning her back on me, "you had better be off to office, and the sooner you go the better." I rose. I thought it good generalship, under the circumstances, to beat a retreat.

"If you think I am fond of dress," continued my wife bitterly, "you should see my sister. She is coming to stop with us next cold weather."

"What?" I exclaimed in counterfeited alarm, as I made for the door. "What's that? *Your sister coming to stop with us? Fonder of dress than you?* Then would you mind ordering a garment for me, along with your cabochons and gallons?"

"And what may that be, pray?" said the wife, in tones that were meant to be crushing.

"A straight jacket." I replied, disappearing behind the purdah.

XIII.

MY SISTER-IN-LAW'S ALARMS.

Not so sick, my Lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies,
That keep her from her rest.

—*Macbeth*,

STUMPING up and down the railway platform, waiting for the Calcutta mail, which was three hours late, I exercised my thoughts by picturing what my sister-in-law would be like. I don't like the sound of the word 'sister-in law;' there is an unpleasant accentuation on the last two syllables suggestive of legal affection; and I came to the conclusion that she would be an interfering old cat. When the train did at last arrive, my first impressions of my wife's sister were a pair of big saucer-like eyes and a bottle of claret, and I was a bit taken aback when the 'old cat' tripped out of her carriage like Titania, not as if she had travelled a thousand miles by rail, but fresh and sweet as if she had sprung ready clad from a milliner's brain, like Minerva from the head of Jove.

"John!" she said, "I am so hungry."

"But not thirsty, I presume," I said, eyeing the St. Julien bottle.

"That!" she said—"that and a box of biscuits have sustained me all the way from Calcutta. I have been saving my refreshment money towards a new frock." My sister-in-law was evidently of the opinion of the Roumanian maidens, *Stomacul un are oglinda*, which is, being interpreted, a girl had much better want for food than for handsome apparel.



MY SISTER-IN-LAW'S ALARM.

When we reached home, my wife's sister went in for what she called a *chhota hassi*—four eggs, two loaves of bread converted into hot-buttered toast, and a thrice-replenished tea-pot. Then she said she would have a little snooze, and forthwith slept eight solid hours of the day, after the manner of animals of crepuscular habits. Consequently, she was as lively as a jackal at midnight, when I—who had risen at four, and had no siesta—said I could keep awake no longer.

"Hubby!" said my wife, when we were retiring, "Muriel is so nervous, she must sleep in the next room to ours, with the door open, and the *purdah* up."

"But, my dear!" I remonstrated, "my dear, do you think—I mean, would it be—that is to say—quite proper, you know."

"Oh, don't be stupid, and be off; I shall put the *purdah* up when the lights are out, and no one's going to look at you, you needn't be afraid."

Now when I go to bed I want to go to sleep, but my wife and her sister have a habit of holding a *soirée* at that particular time. The way those two gabbled and jabbered, for about three hours, sent me pretty near out of my mind. I was sincerely rejoiced when I recognised their voices becoming fainter and their sentences more incoherent, with wider gaps between the words. Gradually they subsided into silence, and then I tumbled into an uneasy slumber. I think I must have waked again in about ten minutes. I am a light sleeper.

"Winnie!" I heard my wife's sister say in a hollow voice.

"Yes, dear."

"Winnie! don't you hear those sounds. There's a man in the dining-room, I am positive. Winnie, I feel I am going to scream."

"John!"

"U—m—m."

"John! get up. Muriel says there is a man in the house. Get up and see, there's a dear."

I get up, and light a candle, and parade the rooms without discovering any marauder. Then I lie down again. In another twenty minutes I hear :

"Winnie!"

"Yes, dear."

"Winnie, there's some one trying to get in at the bath-room door. Winnie, I am sure I am going to faint."

"John!"

"U—g—h."

"Get up, and go the round of the house outside. Muriel says there is some one trying the bath-room door."

"O, hang it, I won't. It's too cold, and I am not dressed."

"I can't help that; Muriel is frightened, and thinks we are all going to be murdered in our beds. Go at once."

"Oh, Pilot, it is a fearful night," I muttered as I made a detour of the house. I met the *chaukidar* at the corner, and he took me for a thief and nearly knocked me down.

"John, was any one there?"

"There was." (Impressively.)

"Who?" cried both sisters at once.

"The *chaukidar*. Now for goodness sake let's sleep in peace. The house is safe inside and out."

The next time I awoke, it was to the tune of piercing screams.

"Muriel, what is it?"

"There's a mad dog in the room," shrieked my sister.
"We shall all be bitten, and die of hydrophobia."

My wife screamed in concert. "John, get up and turn the dog out." I rose sleepily to reach for the candle, and knocked the teapoy over. The crash made my wife and sister cover themselves with the bed clothes, from the depths of which they continued to utter muffled yells. Screaming is contagious ; I felt inclined to shriek myself. It is not pleasant to have to tackle a mad dog in a dark room, with bare legs on.

I rose next morning a bit of a wreck, and expected to find the little sister in a more pitiable plight ; but she was as blooming as a rose bud, and took my breath away by saying she had passed a most enjoyable night. The truth did not flash upon me, till after breakfast, when I was amusing myself by squirting tobacco juice on some plants of mine. I was smoking a cigar at the time, and it did not draw all it might ; I found a weevil hole was the reason. 'One man's meat is another man's poison' I thought to myself. Here, while I was shrivelling up blight by the thousand, like leaves before a fire, with a very mild decoction of tobacco, another parasite was devouring my cigars pure, sucking in nicotine like mother's milk. A dash of red pepper will make most insects pretty sick, but there is a queer little chap who regards it as his daily bread. Unadulterated tobasco would be a mild peg to this individual. Now, my sister-in-law is an alarm-weevil, a terror-microbe, a parasitic fungus of nervousness, a fright-bacillus, a zymotic agent of all sorts of fears. I do hope she will marry a man of high courage, iron nerves, and robust constitution. Otherwise he is bound to be invalided within a month for insomnia or nervous exhaustion, even if he is not sent Home a raving lunatic. He must be brave enough to do battle with rabid dogs, in his night-clothes and in the dark ; robust enough to walk about outside in the cold without catching pneumonia ; and of such calm force of nerve that he can be awakened, by shrieks and screams, twenty times in a night, and go to sleep again quiet as a child. Without a fright or two my sister-in-law wakes up quite jaded in the

morning ; she grows plump on horrors ; a real burglar in the house would be a tonic to her, like a breath of salt ocean air to a worn out Anglo-Indian. Her large luminous eyes seem made to discover terrors in the dark, beyond the power of ordinary sight to ken.

Personally, I can't stand these ghostly nights, and when the weather became warm, it was worse. All doors had to be shut and barred for fear of house-breakers, and we nearly died of suffocation. I have since been undergoing a course of bromide of potassium and chloral to soothe my shattered system.

When my sister-in-law prepared to flit, half of India knew it. The station-master knew it, for one. He is a stout, healthy-complexioned man, but he used to look quite worn whenever he caught sight of my sister-in-law on the platform. The guards knew it I can assure you ; and friends at all stations along the line received kindly intimation. The Viceroy on tour is nothing to my sister-in-law on the war-path. "John," she said, "will you take me down to the station to see about the time of the train?" I drove her there. "I say, which is the station-master's room?" Oh, here. "Please, Mr. Station-master, will you tell me the train for Real-Shindy? 14-30, is it? Thank you so much. Would you mind telling me what o'clock 14-30 is? Half past two, is it? Thank you. Please, Mr. Station-master, is this a good time of year to travel."

"None so bad for them as can afford it."

"Thank you. It is a healthy time, I suppose?"

"Well, we did pull out a cholera corpse this month."

"What? John, did you hear that? I shall have to stop another month with you."

"Of course it will be worse when the Hardwar Fair begins."

"Worse, will it? Then I think I will start to-morrow. But tell me, Mr. Station-master, is this a safe time of year to travel?"

"Aye—you're likely to get a carriage to yourself."

"Good gracious ! I don't want that ; I should die of fright by myself ; you don't think there will be any people travelling ?"

"Likely enough. Perhaps a sight of them."

"Ah, I suppose no wicked young men would be likely to get into a lady's carriage, would they ?"

"Lor, no. Of course, we once had a young gent as tried to travel in a lady's compartment, dressed as a female was."

"Oh, how dreadful, how perfectly awful ! You don't think there are many young men travelling now-a-days dressed as ladies, do you ?"

"Lor, no, Miss."

"Thank you so much Do you think"—I dragged my sister-in-law away by main force—the station-master was beginning to look apoplectic.

When the eventful moment arrived we were at the station a full hour before the train started, and still had barely time to transact our business. A ladies' compartment had to be reserved, station-master consulted, guards taken into confidence, and telegrams despatched all up the line. "John, where's my ticket ? In my purse, it is ? And I am not to change anywhere ? That's a comfort. Have you spoken to the guard about me ?"

"I have."

"I doubt it ; bring him here ; let me hear you."

"Guard !"

"Sir !"

"This is the lady I spoke to you about. She is very nervous, and is travelling alone ; please look after her."

"Certainly, sir."

'And hand over charge of her to the next guard when you change, and tell him to do the same, and so on.'

"Very good, sir."

"And you won't forget I am very nervous, guard. John, are you sure there is nothing more to be done? You have telegraphed to—at Meerut, and—at Umballa, and—at Jullunder, and—at Amritsar, and—at Lahore and—at Jhelum. You are sure they know the time of the train, and will be there to meet me?"

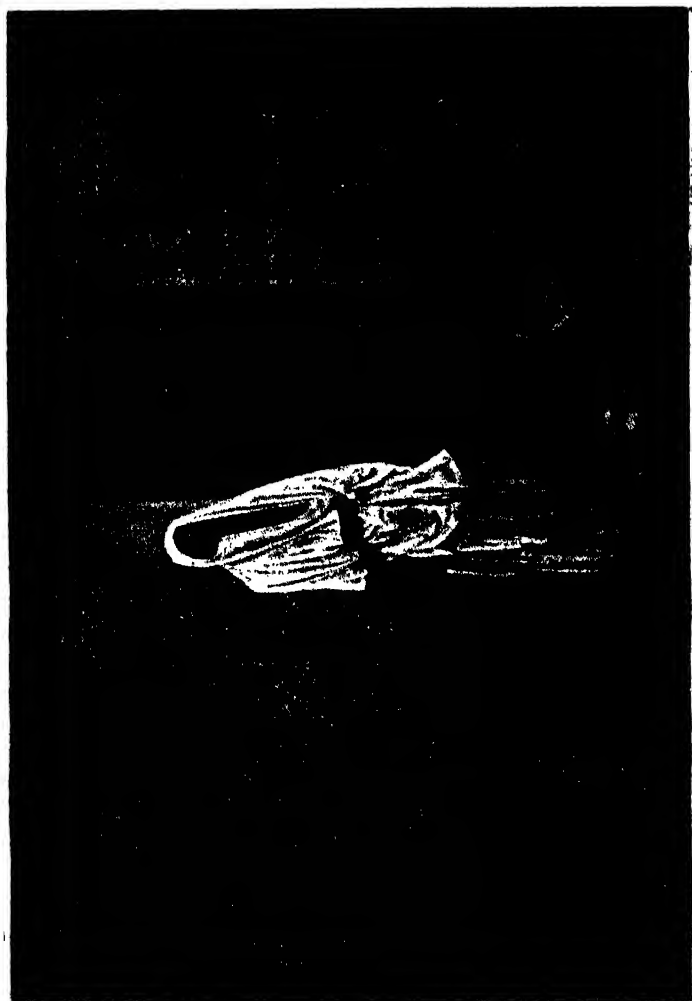
"Yes, yes. All Officers have been instructed to wait on you in full dress. Gentlemen not entitled to wear uniform, to be in frock coats and helmets."

"Don't be stupid. You don't know any one at Ludhiana, do you, nor at Saharanpore, and I have to dine there; however shall I be able to dine by myself?"

"An Officer from Umballa has been deputed to meet you at Saharanpore, and convoy you at dinner."

"That will be nice. Is the train moving? I feel so frightened. I am deliciously nervous. Good-bye, Winnie. I feel sure something is going to happen. Good-bye, John. There is going to be an awful accident, I'm certain. Good-bye. I have strong presentiments I shall never reach my journey's end alive. I will telegraph directly I arrive at Real-Shindy of course. If you don't hear—why—why—goodbye, good-bye."

When the time arrived to receive a telegram, and no news reached us, my wife was in an agony of terror. "You see," she said, "Muriel *was* right; something *has* happened. Do drive down to the telegraph office and send off an urgent." I did so and received a reply that the sister was safe and well. The next morning the post brought in a *measly* deferred message from her: "Arrived safe. Terrible fright all the way. Delightful journey." *Parva momenta in spem mutumque impellunt animos.*



OUR STONES.

XIV. OUR STONES.

Quorum operum causas nulla ratione videre
Possunt, et fieri divino numine censeant.

—LUCRETIVS.

WHEN that stone business of ours commenced, and as long as there was no rational explanation of it, people were fond of throwing out shadowy hints and inuendoes that there always had been something the matter with the house. But when interrogated, they failed to give their suspicions shape. What was wrong with the house they could not exactly say. Was it haunted? They would not go as far as that. Was it anything to do with the grave upon the mound? They rather thought it was. A native gentleman said that the tomb had once been polluted by a syce, and an evil spirit had entered into him, which the most subtle *dawatis* and *bhut-bedars* in the city had failed to exorcise. All the most cunning *jhar-phunks* and *mantar-jantars* had been employed in vain; and the syce had died in great torments. Another said a former tenant of the house had wished to remove the grave, as an eyesore, and he had suddenly and suspiciously thrown up the lease. No one exactly knew why, but it was understood he had been subjected to annoyances of a very severe kind. But whatever the previous history of the place may be, I had lived there some years in peace, until one morning, when my bearer came to me and said solemnly, "*Palthar girta.*"

The bearer is an old servant. He has been in my service ever since I have been in India. I believe him to be intelligent above the average; but when he pleases, he can assume

the expression of a congenital idiot. "*Patthar girta*," he said, looking like a boiled owl.

"All right," I replied. "I hear : what then ? Where are the stones coming from ?"

"God knows."

"Oh, well !" I said, "If you are going to adopt that attitude, you don't suppose I am curious enough to try and worm the information out of you, do you ? Have you anything more to say ?"

"*Bas*," he said, "*Patthar girta*."

"*Achcha*," I replied. "*Ruat calum. Jao*."

A few days later, when we had just finished breakfast, I noticed a scuffling and whispering and coughing in the verandah ; and I remarked to my wife that we were going to be honoured by a deputation.

"What is it all about ?" she said. "I hope all the servants are not on the strike ?"

"Look here," I shouted. "If you people have anything to say, say it ; but don't go squeaking and pattering and making noises out there, as if you were a lot of rats on the other side of a ceiling cloth."

"We have," said the bearer, coming forward as a spokesman, "a representation to make."

"Make it" I replied, "and put some *jaldi* into it."

"*Patthar girta*," he said.

"Damme, you have told us that before. What then ?" He shook his head mournfully, and employed his utmost endeavours to appear as unintelligent as possible.

"Where are the stones coming from ?" I continued.

"*Khabar nahin*."

"Well, if you don't know, who knows ?"

"*Khuda jant*."

"Of course," I said : "we all know that ; but if stones are being thrown, it is reasonable to suppose there is a hand behind them. Now whose hand is propelling these rocks you talk about ?"

"*Bi-l-lah al-'azim*, by the Great God !" said the *khansamah*, who being one of the biggest scoundrels unhung is full of devout phrases.

"*Bi-l-lah al-'azim* !" he mouthed on the other ^{side} ~~said~~ of the chick : "we cannot tell."

"Then find out."

"*Subhan Allah* ! We have tried and failed ; therefore are we come to the cherisher of the poor to protect us."

"Where are the stones falling ?"

"*Al-minnatu-lillahi* ! They fall between the cook-house and your honour's bungalow."

Our dining-room faces the back of the house, and there is a space of ground between the back verandah and the cook-house. Flanking the cook-house are some servants' houses. The front of their houses is walled in by an enclosure with a doorway. The out-houses behind the courtyard are married quarters. The bearer and his family live on one side, and the *bhisti* and his *bhai*, the under-kit and their belongings, live on the other. At the back of the houses is the compound wall ; and behind the compound wall is a stretch of jungle, rocks and *karil* bushes with a *fakir's* temple in the background.

"Very well," I said, "that's something definite. Now, the next point is, from what direction do the stones come ?"

"*Allah re Allah* !" said the *khansamah* throwing up his eyes and stroking his beard. "I speak nought but the truth. They don't come from any direction at all. It's my belief they come upwards from the ground. *Zamin men se panapna*."

"*Han, han,*" croaked the old syce, Muggroo, in his guttural voice. "*Bhut-sa kam.*" And the younger syces and grass-cutters echoed, "*Bhut bhut ; ruh, ruh.*"

"Look here," I said, "if you servants are going to stand hooting there like a pack of owls, I'll have nothing to do with you. Listen. If stones fall into the compound, they are thrown by some one. It is an easy throw from the *jungle* behind over the out-houses. What is more simple ? Station a few men behind the wall, and catch the stone-slinger. Then I will deliver him to the police, and he will throw no more."

"This we have already done, and several times over," said the bearer. "We planted Alla Dia, your honour's *shikari*, on the wall, because he is keen of sight and has eyes like the eyes of a *banbilla*. And Dhulip, syce, who is fleet of foot as a *mrig*—he won the all-comers race in your honour's last athletic sports—was posted outside to catch the devil's spawn. And Mohr Singh, the camel-man, son of the desert air and strong as Rustam, was appointed to hold and beat the *baital* when caught. But there is no one behind the wall—no one at all. If we had to deal with a man we would curse his mother and his sisters, and Alla Dia would see him with his lynx eyes ; and Dhulip, who leaps like an antelope, would run him to a stand-still ; and then Mohr Singh, the strong man who has eaten the air of the *bangar*, would flay the skin from off his back."

"Then how do you account for the stones ?" I asked.

"If the Presence will order," said the *khansamah*, "then will I speak, and the speech will be that of one who never told a lie, otherwise I am silent. Wherefore should I speak without an order ?"

"Say on."

"The Presence will be pleased to consider for a moment that stones do not fly without a cause. *Kuchh dal men kala hai.* There must be something wrong. In the compound

there is a grave (I never tell a lie). This, we know, to be the *kabr* of a holy man, and some *kafir* has defiled it. Let the grave be repaired and whitewashed by a *karigar*, and we will place lighted lamps there on Fridays, and the women who are childless will hang garlands upon it; then will the spirit of the *pir* be appeased, and stones will rise no more. Otherwise, *dagh bar balac dagh*, one misfortune will follow another, and we shall all die. If the Presence will have the sepulchre whitewashed, it will be after the manner of its kindness. *Al-hamdu-li-l-lahi*. Otherwise let there be a *chanda* among us according to our salaries. I am a poor man, but I will give three double *paisas* from my pay, and I speak the truth."

"*Khansamah*, you are an old man, and your beard is dyed with dyes. It is great sorrow to me that you should be so foolish. I do not believe there is aught supernatural in this thing."

"*Hazur malik*."

"*Jao*, then, and catch the stone-throwing son of a pig; or I shall believe he is among you servants yourselves, and the police will come, and bring trouble upon you. This is my order. *Jao*!"

The deputation then departed with much shuffling of shoes on the gritty verandah floor.

"Hubby? I do not like this," said the wife. "There is something uncanny in it. What do you think?"

"The murder will out in time, dear. Don't you bother your little head."

The next night, while we were at dinner, the stone-throwing reached its crisis. The *khitmatgar* came in with a troubled face, and said he was afraid to bring the dinner. The cook-house has a verandah with an iron roof, and a stone dropped on the top of it makes an infernal noise. The

missiles sometimes pitched on the verandah, sometimes on the ground outside. We could hear them drop from inside the room. At the close of the meal, the bearer brought in a *jharan* full of fine specimens of quartzite.

"Don't you use my *jharans* to carry rocks about in," said the wife, with an eye to business.

"Be pleased to look at this," said the bearer selecting an angular stone about twice the size of a man's fist. "Suppose this hit a man on the head."

"How can they when they bubble out of the ground! Kindly keep the stones, bearer; we shall soon have enough for a rockery."

"This is getting beyond a joke, Hubby! Why don't you do something? Do call for the police."

I sent a report to the Subzi-mandi Thana, and the *thanadar* arrived in due course. I noticed he had a pull at the *khansamah's* *hookah* before he presented himself to me. Then he came in bringing a large stone.

"Well, what do you think of it?" I asked.

He looked at the stone, poised it thoughtfully in his hand and said it might be two and a-half seers *pakka*.

"Never mind its weight," I said, "catch the *badmash* who threw it."

He turned the stone over and smelled it; he said it was not thrown by a man. He advised me to whitewash the *fakir's* grave.

"Hubby! this is really serious when the police take the same view of the question. I am getting alarmed, and there is Murjel coming to-morrow to stay with us a few days on her return journey. She will be terrified out of her life."

My sister-in-law did arrive the next evening. She had been escorted by a Railway Engineer, and had been treated to a ride on the engine. She was brimful of the terrors of this perilous journey; but our stones took her eyes out of their sockets, as they say.

"Winnie," she said, "do you mean what you say? I thought riding on an engine was too deliciously dreadful, but what is that to sitting on an earthquake?"

And then the girls jabbered at each other over the business, each wanting all the talk to herself, like two *bann-dars* with one mango between them. I took a stroll over to the stables, as is my habit when I find myself *de trop*, and returned when I thought it would be safe.

"John!" said the little sister, "you don't seem to realise what a terrible thing this is. There you are, smoking as usual, as if nothing were the matter, and the very next moment you might be blown to perdition."

"I think not."

"John! I had a presentiment about this. I dreamt three times that you and Winnie were threatened with some dire disaster. Let us all leave the house till this convulsion of nature is over. These stones are a warning, John; we may be sitting over a volcano, ripe for eruption, and be swallowed up like Pompeii and Herculaneum. John, I will take you to Calcutta with me; by Jove, I will."

"Don't be cracked, Muriel; you see the old'un isn't afraid."

"Then, John, you must call for the police."

"I have done so already."

"Pooh! a native, what use is he? Isn't there a police officer in the station?"

"There is."

"Unmarried."

"There is one unmarried."

"That's good. Don't like married men—no offence to you, John—they know too much. Is he young?"

✓ "In the hey-day of life."

"Delicious. Good-looking?"

"Very."

"Dear boy! send for him Winnie, we might have a party of nice men, and have a volcano hunt after dinner. It would be altogether too entrancingly dreadful, such terrifying fun."

Rivers Meadow of the Police came over the next evening, keen as blazes, and said he would soon stop the rot. He brought an army of policemen, and drew a cordon round the premises. The stones began jumping as usual, about eight o'clock, and Meadow got his blood up, and no mistake. He crawled along the ground like a serpent, scaled walls like a cat, ran up trees like a monkey, and ordered his men about like a Field-Marshal. At ten o'clock he re-entered the house, with scratched face and torn clothes, and said he was done.

"Give me a drink, like a good chap," he gasped, "I am that dry."

"Dear Mr. Meadow, good Mr. Meadow, brave Mr. Meadow!" said the little sister, with clasped hands. Have you caught him?"

He shook his head mournfully. "I have searched the *fakir's* temple, crawled about in the *jungle*, lain on the top of the roof, had all your servants under guard, my men posted all along the wall, and the stones dropped about the place as lively as ever. Can't think——"

("You don't think it is a spirit, Mr. Meadow?"

"Rather not."

"Nor the eruption of Vesuvius?"

"Ha! ha!"

"Don't laugh. I am so frightened."

"You shall have a guard to-night. Say, Brown, can't do more to-night. I will be over to-morrow."

The next evening we had a dinner-party. Guests were invited to witness the extraordinary fall of thunderbolts and meteoric stones in our compound. It was pitch dark, but we could hear them drop, one by one, on the hard ground. A scientific gentleman told my sister that it was the most wonderful thing he had ever known. He carried off some stones in his dress coat pocket. He said he believed they had fallen from another planet. I sneaked about and studied the phenomenn very carefully that night. A stone fell at my feet as I was standing near the courtyard wall, and I carried it to Meadow.

"I'll take my oath, my boy, this stone came out of the enclosure. You could not have cleared all the servants out."

"Hush!" he said. "Don't make a rumpus now, I'll have a *pakka bandobast* for to-morrow, you see."

Next evening, the fall of the first aerolite was followed by sounds of shrieks and a scuffle. Meadow shouted "Come on, I have him;" and out we rushed in wild excitement, to find our gallant police officer in the arms of the *bhiti's* mother. "D——it," he said, mopping his forehead, "why ain't she a man? Pah! She's not over sweet either."

"Shall we take the old woman to the *hawalat*?" asked the *thanadar*.

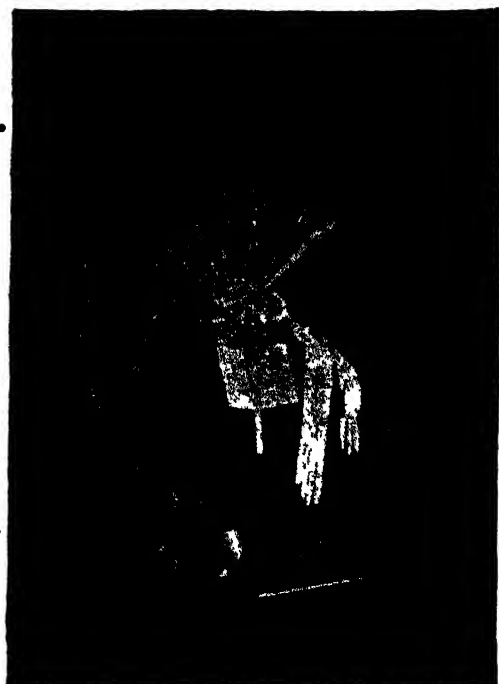
"No, no, poor thing!" cried the ladies with *esprit de corps*.

"Forgive her, cherisher of the poor?" moaned a slimy body, which flung itself at my feet. "She is a woman, and

old. Have compassion on her. She will throw stones no more. If another stone come, hang me up by the neck, blow me off from a gun, kill me any way you please. But forgive her; I am her son. Let me *bandobast karo* her."

We gave the woman over to the *bhisti*, and he led her away.

We never discovered all the ins and outs, the little ramifications of this mystery: nor do I know that we ever tried. When we ironically taxed the *khansamah* about the *fakir's* grave he said—"Allah-billah-tallah—was I not right? I never tell a lie. The *budhiya* had lost many sons and grandsons. She is afraid of dying without male issue. Assuredly, some one has told her that the pollution of the *fakir's* grave is the cause. If the sepulchre had been whitewashed, as I said, the stones would have ceased. I speak nothing but the truth. I am still ready to contribute three double *paisas*. *Main kabhi jhuth nahin bolta.*" The most surprising thing to me was that the old lady had the strength to throw such heavy stones. But the wife said there was nothing extraordinary in this. She had seen the woman carrying water, and said she had a fine arm, with a wonderful *forceps*. As we discussed the incident in the evening, over our cheroots, we heard a sound of wailing in the distance, and were told that it was the *bhisti* *samjhao-ing* his Ma. The servants call the *bhisti* the *bhun-chal ka beta* to this day.



HUNTER ON MARRIAGE.

XV.

HUNTER ON MARRIAGE.

Sir, we had a good talk.

—JOHNSON.

“THE reason,” said Horsey Hunter, “of so many unhappy marriages is that men will not make up their minds as to what they want. In purchasing a horse, the first desideratum is for a man to decide what kind of horse he requires. If he does not know his own mind, no one can possibly know it for him. The next point is that he should allow nothing to turn him from his resolution, and never permit himself to be talked into buying a horse he does not like. It is the same with a wife. Otherwise a man is only tossed about from error to error; finding the apples, that seemed so goodly, turn to Dead Sea ashes in the mouth; or possibly, like the dog in the story, losing the substance altogether in snatching at the shadow.”

“This promises to be interesting, Horsey; I pray you continue.”

“What I mean to say is, although a man may desire a horse, its suitability will depend on his habit and style of riding, and on the manner of his seat in the pigskin. If an individual who cannot ride a two-penny-half-penny dam (I use the word in the sense of a small Roman coin of that name) select a vicious, intemperate, though possibly handsome mount, it is only too likely he will live to regret it. There is a Tzigane proverb—‘Better a donkey you can manage, than a fine horse that throws you off.’ Some men, of course, can ride any horse that was ever foaled. Assheton Smith was one. We are told he had no fancies ‘as to size, action, mouth or temper. Little or big, sulky, violent, or restive, if a horse could

gallop and jump, he was a hunter the moment he found himself between the legs to Tom Smith.' As Assheton Smith with a horse, so was Petruchio with a woman. Mark the masterly way in which he Hayesified that Katharina Minola. Nor was this a solitary instance of success. You might pick out any shrew—Judith or Xantippe, Lucretia Borgia, or Catherine de Medicis—and I warrant he would make a quiet hack of any of them in even time. These men were masters of their craft; but it is not every fool who gets himself measured for a pair of riding pants who can sit a buck-jumper.

"A man with no hands should eschew a horse with too light a mouth, or he may find himself bumping unpleasantly in the saddle. Many a high-spirited, nervous horse is fretted to death in a curb, while it can hardly be held in a snaffle. Such may go quietly enough in the hands of a fine horseman, but are eminently unsuited for timid, elderly gentlemen.

"Therefore, I say, let a man know what is likely to suit him, and make for the nearest approach to it, without deviating to the right or to the left. If, for instance, some quiet fellow who doesn't dance, haunt a ball-room for a partner—not for a valse, but for life—he is like a man who frequents a circus to select a hack. That elegant creature there, pawing the air so sweetly, with its bearing reins and showy trappings, looks very smart in the gas-light; but is it likely to make a useful, every-day companion? If a man want a hack, why choose a ballet horse that prances and capers every time it hears a band?

"The reasons why men who sell horses and mothers-in-law who marry daughters have a bad reputation are one and the same. It is a reputation that neither deserves. 'The less a man knows about an' oss', says the immortal Jorrocks, 'the more he expects, and the greater the probability of his thinking himself *done*.' If you substitute the word 'woman' for 'oss', the saying is equally true. The sooner a man realises that he gets nothing for nothing and very little for sixpence, the better for him. To the Tomfool who wants an angel who will regard him

as a demigod, or who desires a nice little cob, handsome as paint, with perfect temper and manners, action and ~~pace~~, sound as a bell, which can walk five and trot ten miles an hour, and jump a five-barred gate as if it were a puddle in the road, all for a ten-pound note, the appropriate reply is equally 'Don't you wish you may get it?' He had better, much better, climb down quietly in his notions, or bitter experience may give him an ugly and unpleasant fall. It is not your Assheton Smiths and Petruchios who abuse the dealers; and I put it to you, John, have you, in real life, ever met a sensible man—I say sensible, mind you—who had a word to say against his wife's mother?"

"Well . . . no . . . I don't think—"

"Of course not."

"Well, they do say that mothers-in-law are interfering, don't they?"

"Don't you make a mistake, John, and go following the crowd like a sheep because you hear some old bell-wether tinkling in the distance. Now, I'll ask you another question. What are your feelings towards a man to whom you have sold a horse you wanted to get rid of? Eh, what? *Gratitude*. Quite right, my boy. Now that is how a man's mother-in law feels towards him. When you have parted with your crook, you don't want to know whether the owner is going to put on heel-ropes or keep his new purchase in a loose-box. You don't ask him whether he intends to feed on oats, or gram or barley, or bran. It is not your business if he rides in a snaffle or Pelham, or bit and bridoon. You have told him beforehand all you intended him to know, and you leave him to find out the rest. Of course, if you thought he were treating the horse badly or injudiciously, you might tell him so pretty freely, and serve him darned well right: but, otherwise, trust a mother-in-law to keep clear of the details of the new *manège*."

"Well, but I suppose a dealer, or a mother-in-law for the matter of that, might sell a man a pup."

"My dear fellow, that's his look-out. If a man fall in love with a handsome screw and will have it at any price, who's to blame? No one in the world loves a clean, blood-like thoroughbred-looking head more than I do; but if a Roman-nosed fiddle-headed cocktail suited my programme better, I'd let the pretty face go—

'E'en tho' her jesses were my dear heart strings,
I'd whistle her off, and let her down the wind,
To prey at fortune.' "

"But a chap might be taken in by an advertisement."

"A man who buys from an advertisement may say with Rabelais 'Je m'en vay chercher un grand peut-estre.' If he does not obtain all his imagination led him to expect, who's to blame, again? No, John, let a man look for himself: trot her out, look at her paces, note her temper, watch her in the stable, or if he don't know a horse from a mule, consult a judge like myself; don't blame the owner. It may be a woman's business to marry a daughter. She may be in the position of 'owner going home,' or 'leaving the service?' possibly she may have one too many in the stable; possibly also, she may be weeding out for vice. That's the purchaser's look-out. It is always sound to obtain satisfactory reasons for parting."

"But a man can't always obtain the opinion of a disinterested judge."

"Then let him do without it. For, mark me, John, although it may be sound enough to procure the opinion of a judge, a man must always end by backing his own. That is the great point after all. How many men are put off from their—not necessarily bad—selection, by hearing some petty disparaging remark from an acquaintance or friend. The point is, not whether the world in general admires your choice, but whether it suits you. If you are satisfied, that's enough. You can snap your fingers in the world's face and say—

'I chose her for myself:
If she and I are pleased,
What's that to you?'

On the other hand, a man may have a showy charger, that the whole station covets, while he himself only knows the rows its tricks produce.

“And after purchase, let no man be disappointed because the filly does not look so sweet in his stable as she did at home. It is a dealer's business to show his wares to best advantage. If the purchaser did not note the restless looks and the ears put back level with the neck, experience will teach him they mean pouting lips and red eyes, with gall and wormwood in their train. But let no man lose his temper, John, however unfortunate he may be, or however tried. No man who cannot keep his temper will ever control his horses. Temper means weakness, and weakness cruelty. The strong and the brave are never cruel. ‘Omnis enim ex infirmitate feritas est?’ As friend Hayes says, no man who loses his temper, or shows timidity in the saddle, deserves the name of a horseman.”

“But, look here, Horsey, you have been talking all along on the supposition that there is only one side to the bargain. This may be all very well in the case of horses, but you forget—”

“I forget nothing of the sort. A man can't buy any horse he fancies, any more than he can any woman. Nor do I forget that horses have their likes and dislikes. Remember the Ardrowan colt and Jem Robinson, and Mentor and Mat Dawson. A man should never buy a horse that takes a dislike to him, however suitable it may otherwise be. Let it pass to some more fortunate owner, as he values his peace of mind—

‘Be she fairer than the day,
Or the flowery meads in May,
If she be not fair to me,
What care I how fair she be.’

I know a chap who proposed to a filly four times, and was refused.”

“Well, if he was refused, that was all right, wasn't it?”

"Ah, but he proposed a fifth time, and was accepted. She told him she did not care for him the price of a curry-comb; but he would have her."

"What happened then?"

"What you might expect. She mauled him three times within a twelvemonth; for all the world, like Muley Edris mauled Archer, and—"

"And then?"

"She bucked him off altogether, and broke his neck."

"His neck?"

"His heart, if you like. Perhaps it had better been his neck. But if you escape the mauling, what pleasure is there in a horse that does its work as a duty, and resents your familiarities when the work is done. Do you remember the words of Cornélis père in Paul Bourget's novel? '*C'est si triste de sentir qu'on est de trop dans sa propre maison, qu'on possède une femme par tous les droits, qu'elle vous donne tout ce que ses devoirs l'obligeant a vous donner, tout excepte son cœur, qui est à un autre.*'"

"This is not what it should be."

"Then what is?"

"Why, this, my boy—

'Shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart, through life
We went, ne'er asking which was best or first,
Unknowing envy, jealousy, or strife,
Sure of each other through the best and worst.'



THE LAST OF MY SISTER-IN-LAW.

XVI.

THE LAST OF MY SISTER-IN-LAW.

C'est une étrange affaire qu'une demoiselle.

—Molière.

“A SISTER-IN-LAW,” said Horsey Hunter, “is a man’s natural enemy.”

“Eh! what’s that?”

“She regards him as an old crock that has seen better days. She doesn’t object to making use of him, when it suits her convenience; but she won’t pet him, and pat him, and feed him with sugar, you may take your affidavit. Unmarried men are as the young, sound, showy horses, to be used circumspectly: the brother-in-law is the old quad, who has had his day. Uncommon useful is the old horse for keeping out in the cold and wet when dining out at night; or for hitching on to the office gari; or may be for conveying the *khansemah* and his *degchis* in the pic-nic *ekka*. He is useful; and when he dips his sad old nose in the gram bucket, he has earned his feed hardly.”

I did not quite like these remarks. They came upon me like an unpleasant revelation. I once thought that when I could lace up a lady’s dress at the back, I should be—as Mrs. R. said—“like Cæsar’s wife, and have passed the Barbican.” That’s how we all err. The more ignorant we are, the less we think there is to learn. An idiot of a bachelor, who can’t tell the difference between tulle and tarlatan, imagines himself at the Land’s End of knowledge. I, who had mastered the science of back-lacing, found myself at John O’Groat’s house, in the very ABC of sister-in-law.

Perhaps there may have been some excuse for error. Back-lacing is not as simple as it sounds: especially when you

have to deal with a creature whose *folie, c'est la toilette*. Let no man imagine that a woman can't see behind her back; and that therefore missing out a hole or two, and trifling irregularities of that kind, will not be noticed. Give any woman a couple of mirrors, and she can see her back as easily as she can see her face. The first time I back-laced my wife, her face was a picture. It was like the face of a man who finds a green bug in his soup. Then she spoke to me like George Eliot's Ben Winthrop, when he said to the parish clerk: "It's your inside as aint right made for music; it's no better than a hollow stalk." I could only clap my hands submissively, and exclaim "Hunc ego si potui tantum sperare dolorem." I never miss out a hole now, and the lace follows the upper sides of the left row and the under sides of the right row, with the regularity of a machine. Lastly, I am strong enough in the fingers to pull a 21-inch woman into a 17-inch dress. That's where *ayahs* fail. You may teach them to lace, but you can't put strength in their finger tips. They mess, and tug, and haul about the lace with button-hooks and hair pins, till it is as rotten as pears; and then, just as the impatient mistress thinks it all over, bang goes saxpence, the lace has snapped, there is not a single spare one in the house, and then there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. *Chez moi*, we manage things differently. The machinery gear being adjusted, I give my wife warning. One, two, three, off! She takes a deep inspiration, and before she has occasion to take breath again, we are both a bit red in the face, but the dress—*eh bien*, the dress is adorable. "Monsieur," says the wife, with a mirror in her hand and her back to the cheval glass, tip-tilting her head, in that attitude well known to married men, resembling the posture of a stork preparing to swallow a frog, "Monsieur, you are an artist." "Madam," I reply, bowing with my hand on my heart, "I am your most obedient servant?" and then I retire to tie my own white choker.

My sister-in-law is one of those things no feller can understand. She is as full of surprises as the Church Service. She is like Captain White's Oriental pickles, labelled as being a

delicious compound of sweets and sour. She is like a badly mixed chutney : you think you have hold of something sweet, perhaps a raisin, and you are surprised with a chilli : you prepare your palate for a bit of mango, and lo ! a clove of garlic. She is always either the most miserable woman on earth, or in the seventh heaven of delight. She sings at a concert, and either rivals the prima donna, or makes a woful exhibition of herself. At a dance she has the most perfect programme, and is the cynosure of wondering eyes ; or she is the most absolute and dismal failure among the wall-flowers. She jerks through life in zigzags, like a dragon fly.

She is as mercurial as the thermometer at Quetta, where you require pankabs by day, and sleep in poshtins by night. She is like the climate in the rains—you never know where you are. If it's cold, let it be cold, and I wear a tweed suit ; if hot, let it be hot, and put me in drill ; but blank your cholera belts. The joke of it is, she says she doesn't know what I mean. She says all girls are the same. In this she resembles the Scotch merchant who affirmed, "There's no an honest man in the worlrd ; a ken it by mysel."

I am not quite sure she is not like an Æolian harp. *Perse se* an irresponsible, inert thing, but liable to be wakened into life by a breath of air. Sometimes, the breeze seems to come direct from paradise ; and then she sobs out songs like "Last Night," and "There is no one like her," in a way that almost breaks your heart, and makes you think of innocent childhood, and mother's kisses, and flowers, and singing birds and first love : and you feel that if you died, you would float straight away to heaven. Then comes a puff of air from crowded cities, and she breaks out into a ribald music-hall ditty that rouses all the old Adam, and makes you feel as if the devil were after you. Sometimes I was afraid she might break out into "Wot cher ! all the neighbours cry" in Church.

The girl was not safe. One moment she would come at you like a catamaran, and hit you in about twenty places all

at once ; and the next minute throw her arms round your neck and weep as if her heart would break. There was the occasion when she came into the room and found my wife in tears. Now a mother-in-law, as Horsey says, would have acted like the Levite, and passed by on the other side. But my legal sister came at me like a bull-dog. "What," she said. "Have you been ill-treating my sister? I scor-rn you? you wr-r-retch." In such cases, she pronounced every letter of her words, just as M. Deshorties, *sous-chef aux instances* in the novel *L'Affaire Froideville*, when he calls Colturier a fool, "un sot—il prononçait *sotte*, pour donner plus d'énergie à cette qualification." Of course, I was naturally alarmed, and as I retreated beneath her flashing glance (she has a fine pair of eyes), seeking refuge behind the impedimenta of a modern drawing-room, my wife was good enough to explain that the tears were tears of joy, because I had promised her a tiara of diamonds (Faulkner's). "What?" she then exclaimed. "A tiara? Diamonds? John. Good, kind, handsome, generous John. Come to me, and if you give me a tiara too, I'll give you a kiss. I felt I deserved *ni cet excès d'honneur, ni cette indignité*."

I don't suppose my wife would like it if I had always a pet bull-dog by my side which would go for her if she came near me, or raised her voice above a minor key. I did not like it either, and one morning I strolled off to consult my friend William. Now William is a very subtle man, like Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother. His wisdom is as the wisdom of the snakes. On the way, I passed the ubiquitous Horsey, tooling along his chestnuts in a tandem. "What's up? old man," he said, "wife been combing your mane?"

"No" (sulkily).

"Ah, it's the filly, the little sister, is it?"

"What's that to you?"

"She's above herself, John: cut her gram, longe her."

"Longe her! oh, I dare say."

"If that doesn't answer, Hayesify her; sit on her head."

I should like to see Horsey, or any other man, sitting on my sister-in-law's head. I felt quite cross with him that morning. He's a horse doctor, he is, and don't understand women. William received me with his usual quiet sympathy, "I'll give you a charm," he said, as he wrote something on a piece of paper. "Now take this home. No, don't read it at present; use it when you are in trouble." I took the charm and started. I don't pretend to be better than other people. I opened and read it as soon as I was clear of the compound wall. It contained the words "Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill." What's the meaning of this? I said to myself; can William be pulling my leg? I was so reflective as I shaved for breakfast, that I cut myself. My wife remarked the sticking plaster, and observed "Cut yourself again, I see - wool-gathering as usual, I suppose. . . . Out with it, what were you thinking of this time?"

"Well, I was thinking of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill."

"Good gracious! what about it?"

"Sure to pass, you know."

"Never."

"Oh yes, dead certain."

"What an iniquitous thing."

"Not at all."

"Why, a wife will never be able to have her sister to stop with her."

"What an idea. Why not?"

"Why, a husband might fall in love with her."

"What then? He might do that in either case; and surely it is much better that he should fall in love with a woman he can marry than with a woman he cant."

"Hubby! What do you mean? Tell me the truth. You are not falling in love with Muriel, are you.?"

"Well, my dear, of course . . . that is . . . I mean, of course your sister is a very pretty girl."

"That does not answer my question, sir. Tell me at once are you, or are you not, in love with her."

"My dear, how can I be when I am in love with you. But (a deep sigh) you must know yourself your sister is a dangerously fascinating woman. I assure you when she sings 'There is no one like her,' she makes me feel quite queer; she does indeed."

"Hubby, Muriel must go home at once."

"No, no."

"Yes, she must, she shall. I never thought of this."

My wife is a woman of her word. That evening at 9 P. M. my sister-in-law was waving *de tendres et déchirants adieux* out of the Calcutta mail, homeward bound.



MISS TARAND.

XVII.

MISS TARAND.

"You can measure a woman's imbecility by the number of novels she reads in a twelvemonth."

"HUBBY!" said my wife, looking up from her letters "Amy Tarand says she will be passing through next week. Shall I ask her to stop with us a little?"

Miss Tarand was a chum of my wife's. Her name was really Amelia; this was abbreviated into Amy by her friends, and into Aimée by the lady herself! She was a girl with the most inordinate appetite for novels I ever knew; with this further peculiarity that she took the colouring of the particular work she was devouring at the time. She was like a kaleidoscope: every time she opened a fresh book, her pattern changed. If you were cute you might tell from her demeanour what the novel was.

At the time my wife made the above proposal I was not aware of this idiosyncrasy, because I had never met Miss Tarand, but a very short acquaintanceship disclosed it. When it was quite settled that she was to come, I was told off to meet her on arrival. The train came in so early that my wife said she would have to dress the night before, and not go to bed at all. So I swallowed a cup of tea and started alone. I had to look out for a stylish-looking girl, with a pale face, grey eyes, and ginger-coloured hair.

I had no difficulty in finding her from this description.

"Miss Tarand, I presume," I said, lifting my hat, after the manner of Stanley, when he met Livingstone in the wilds of Africa.

"And iss that you, Mr. Brown?" she replied. "And wass you ferry well. And it iss a great fright I hef had, and I wass thinking I would neffer find you among all sa people, and it iss no wonder."

This language took me aback. Was the girl mad, or was I? Had I been dreaming that she was coming from Dinapore or had she been shipped direct from Stornoway? I didn't quite like the look of her, and felt anxious to make her over to my wife, so I hustled my pony a bit.

"And why was you driving so fast?" she said.

"My wife will be anxious to see you," I replied, applying the whip again, and making the little mare trot out all she knew.

"Your wife? Ah, dear Sheila!" My wife's name is not Sheila, and a dreadful fear came over me that I had eloped with the wrong young woman. I was intensely relieved when we arrived home, and saw the two ladies rush into each other's arms, and kiss, and giggle, after the manner of their kind.

"You did not tell me Miss Tarand was Scotch," I said to my wife reproachfully, when the girl was safe in her room.

"Scotch?"

"Yes, Scotch! why, the girl has been talking Gaelic to me all the way home."

"Not a bit of it," said the wife. "She is no more Scotch than I am. She has only been reading the 'Princess of Thule.' That's all."

"Oh!" I said, relieved. "Will she keep it up long?"

"Dear me, no! She'll be Lady Clara Vere de Vere by dinner time, or Becky Sharp, or Sairey Gamp. To-morrow she'll be something else. It all depends on what books she reads."

I found the girl a very pretty study: an interesting conundrum: a sort of walking acrostic; a charade, in which you had to guess the name of the novel.

For example, one day instead of sipping her claret at luncheon, she said she thought women should not drink, and called for water. I thought at first she had been reading *L'Assommoir*, but I was doubtful on this point, because she had not delivered herself of any French words or expressions. The girl had been educated abroad and had a pretty knowledge of French. She disdained translations. I did not hit the nail on the head till that evening.

We were going to a dance that night, and when the Tarand girl appeared in the drawing-room in her full war-paint, she looked decidedly fetching, and I told her so. She struck an attitude at once, and, coquettishly lifting her frock, sang

"Look at me here, look at me there,
Criticise me everywhere,
I am most sweet from head to feet,
And most perfect and complete."

"Eureka!" I exclaimed, giving her a clap. "So you have been reading 'A Mummer's wife,' have you?"

"How did you know that?"

"Let me ask you a question instead. Do you know the book is on Mudie's Index Expurgatorius?"

"Expurga, how much? What does that mean?"

"It means that it is a book which your papa and mamma might not like you to read."

Amelia blushed, not the blush of an English country girl, surging over neck and face in a hot flood, but the tiny flush of a five-season Indian spin: a puny growth, like some feeble plant in an uncongenial climate, struggling for existence.

My wife had her back to us. She was ~~adorned~~ ^{adorned} with a fan-mirror on the wall. The room was not well lighted, and the mirror was more than half painted over with water lilies and storks, *et hoc genus omne*; but it was better than nothing. If there be a looking-glass in a room, my wife is generally there or thereabouts. She wheeled to the right-about at this conversation.

"What's that?" she said. "Amy, you must just bring me that book. I will see if it is fit for you to read." (My wife is just three weeks younger than her friend.)

"I like that," retorted Amelia. "If you can read it, why shouldn't I?"

"Amy!" said my wife, drawing herself up to her full height—she is five feet two-and-a-half in hers—, I mean without her French heels. "You forget yourself. I am a married woman and *you* are a girl. Only a *girl*."

Amelia looked as if she were going to snort defiance, so I stepped in and hustled them both off to the *gari*.

Only the next day Miss Tarand appeared in the very quietest of black morning dresses. She was thoughtful and subdued, and said she intended giving up dances altogether. This was no light renunciation, for Miss Aimée danced like the daughter of Herodias, and had told me only a few hours before that she simply *lived* for this form of amusement. It turned out that she had been reading the prison scene in 'Adam Bede.' I could hardly keep my eyes off the girl, she seemed so changed. At times there was a radiance in her face, as if the strong and simple purity of Dinah Morris were shining through it, like a ray of light from another world.

This phase lasted longer than usual. It nearly carried her through two whole days. But on the evening of the second, I noticed the light was waning. It was no longer clear and steady. It was like the flickering of a candle, when the grease has melted away, and the last bit of wick is consuming itself in gaps. Each fitful flicker for existence brings it nearer its close.

The following morning, just as I was applying 'Pomade Hungroise' to my moustache, my wife rushed into my dressing-room (she likes gummed moustaches) and said excitedly: "Hubby, where, where is Amelia?"

"Good gracious!" I exclaimed. "You don't imagine for a moment that I have the girl here. Upon my word of honour——"

"We can't find her," continued my wife, wringing her hands. "She is not in her room. She is not in the house, and breakfast is getting cold. You don't think she can imagine herself to be Hetty, and be going to hang herself?"

"Compose yourself, my dear," I said reassuringly, giving my moustache a final turn. "I don't think any thing of the sort, and besides Hetty did not hang herself. She was not hanged at all." Then I put on my coat and went to reconnoitre. As she was not in the house, I naturally made for the garden.

"Are you looking for the Miss Sahib?" said my old syce, Muggroo. "She is up a tree."

"What?" I said.

"Yes," he continued, pointing to a decrepit old tree in the compound—"Darakht pay ja baithi."

Sure enough, he was right. Miss Tarand!" I called out from below.

"What do you want?" she replied curtly from her perch.

"I want you to come down."

"Shan't. Go away. Go to Clytemnerestera."

Ah! I said to myself, she's been reading Bret Harte's 'Miss.' I must humour her.

"Lissy!" I said, "I'm hungry, and won't have breakfast till you come."

"Are you speaking the truth? Hope you'll die if you're not?"

I assented to the oath, and added tragically: "I am waiting, Lissy."

She clambered down, and taking my hand said: "So hand in hand they passed from the damp aisles and forest odours into the sunlit road."

Another morning I heard a great gabbling and clamour of tongues in the drawing-room, as if a flock of 'seven sisters' had found their way in there. I left my work, and sneaked in to see what it was all about. My wife was so excited that she

did not notice I was smoking a cigarette. She does not allow me to smoke in the drawing-room.

"Oh, Jack!" she exclaimed, "I want to be a 'précieuse.'"

"So you are, my precious."

"No," she said. "Now don't be silly, Hubby. You really must learn to be sensible *sometimes*, and not *always* be talking nonsense. I mean 'précieuse' in the sense of 'une femme distinguée.'"

"Ah!" I said thoughtfully, blowing a cloud of blue smoke towards the ceiling. "What book is Miss Aimée at now?"

"Oh! it is all about the Court of the Tuileries and so interesting. It is—oh bother, here's the *khansamah*"—my wife then entered into an animated discussion with the servant, ending in a dispute as to whether the total should be Rs. 2-14-6 or Rs. 2-14-9.

"Give him the *odd paisa*," I said, "and let the scoundrel go."

"I won't give in," she replied.

Miss Tarand looked from her to me, and then said in a pert sort of way: "La souveraine habileté consiste à bien connaître le prix des choses."

"That's right, Amy," said my wife. "Give it to him. I wish I were witty like you."

I was nettled. I was not going to have Rochefoucauld crammed down my throat by a girl of that age. So I paid her back in her own coin and said: "Il n'y a point de sots si incommodes que ceux qui ont de l'esprit." I was a bit sorry when the words were out, as I thought she might be hurt, but not a bit of it.

"How entrancing, how charming!" she said, coming at me with open arms; "why, we are like Madame Recamier and Chateaubriand. Ah, Monsieur, vous me touchez jusqu'au fond du cœur. Soyez mon ange tutélaire, mon bon génie. Je pense à vous."

"Et moi," I said, falling into her mood, "Je n'ai jamais qu'une pensée. Cette pensée, c'est vous. Jamais on n'a aimé comme je vous aime"—

"Hullo, hullo !" said the wife interrupting the rapier-like play of our exchange of pleasantries. "You two seem to be forgetting yourselves. What is the meaning of this ?

"We are only playing 'précieuse,' dear," I said. "Amelia is Madame Recamier and I am Monsieur de Chateaubriand ; you, of course, are a 'femme distinguée.' We—

"I don't approve of the game," said the wife severely. "Je vous aimé indeed ! Here, be off to your work. Smoking in my drawing-room too. What do you mean by it ?"

I slunk back to my office, feeling like our old goat when she has been chivied out of the flower-garden.

Miss Tarand played some score of characters during her stay with us. When she left, wife and I saw her off ; and as the train shrieked, and throbbed, and glided out of the station, my wife took my arm affectionately. "We are alone again, you and I," she said ; and then, as if the thought were treason to her friend, she added : "Poor Amy. We shall miss her. She was so original ! Wasn't she ?"

"Original ?"

"Don't you think so ?"

"My dear ! Miss Tarand has treated us to a very interesting series of *tableaux vivants* ; but—have you ever heard of the Island of Medamothy ?"

"No. What about it ?"

"On that island lives a creature called a 'tarand.' Its peculiarity is that it changes its colour according to its surroundings. It takes the tint of anything close to it, and if it be itself—"

"Then what colour is it ?"

"The colour of an ass."

My wife looked perplexed. Married though she is, I am happy to say she has not read Rabelais.

XVIII.

MY WIFE'S ABSENCE.

Real life is a race through sore trouble,
 That gains not an inch on the goal,
 And bliss an untangible bubble,
 That cheats an unsatisfied soul,
 And the whole
 Of the rest, an illegible scroll.

—A. L. Gordon.

MY wife caressed her chin and looked thoughtful.

We all have our little ways of wearing ~~our~~ considering caps. Some men smoke a pipe, others bite their nails, or gnaw the ends of their pens or moustaches. I knew one man who used to unbutton his waistcoat from end to end, and then button it up again. He said by the time he had undone the top button he had laid all the *pros* and *cons* of the question before himself; and when he had fastened the bottom button, he had fully made up his mind as to the course to adopt. This is merely a matter of individual idiosyncrasy. My wife takes a pull at her chin.

The origin of this action is perhaps a little curious. My wife has a *souffçon* of a double chin. This used to be a source of trouble to her. She wrote to the editor of the *Lady's Pictorial* and was advised to drum on it frequently with the backs of her fingers. This drumming, it was said, would gradually repress all tendency to enlargement. I regretted this little incident: not because I minded the drumming *per se*, although it did give my wife the appearance of incipient lunacy, but because she was given to ask me what tune I supposed she was hammering out. Now Integral Calculus is child's play compared to discovering the air which a person may be silently tapping out under the chin. I often wonder I am alive to tell this tale. My wife used to select a time when I was awfully busy, and say, "Now, look here, Hub, what tune is this?"



MY WIFE'S ABSENCE.

"My dear, I don't know," I say sadly. I know so well what is in store for me.

"Oh, yes, you do, look again—I'll make it very clear." I do look, and see four pretty little fingers bobbing up and down an *embonpoint* curve.

"Say," she continues, impatiently.

"I can't tell dear." (A deep sigh.)

"Say something." (Persuasively.)

"Well (despairingly) I should say it was 'The Lay of the Last Lunatic Minstrel.'"

"It isn't then. Do you mean that to be sharp? Take care you don't cut yourself, and guess again."

"I guess it is 'A Tease is worse than a Shrew.'"

"Wrong again. You *are* stupid. It's 'I bet you a dollar you don't.'"

"Very appropriate. Now is that all?"

"No. I'll play you 'Little Sweetheart, come and kiss me.'"

"May I suggest something else?"

"What's that?"

"Let's have God Save the Queen and finish up the concert."

I don't know how long this drumming business might not have continued, but one day I happened to see in the *Queen* (I have to read these abominable papers in self-defence) that a double chin was a sign of nobility. I pointed this out to my wife and she dropped the tapping forthwith. She encourages her dewlap now. I tell her in time she may arrive at a ducal collection of chins, or possibly develop a go'tre of absolutely regal proportions.

I couldn't help relating this little incident of domestic life, but in doing so I have run off the rails a bit, and must hark back. What was I saying? Oh, yes, my wife caressed her chin, and looked thoughtful. Then she said: "Hubby, I think I should like to go to my people for a little."

"All right, dear, go."

"Well, you need not look so delighted about it."

✓ That's my wife all over. I assented cheerfully, and she declared I was glad to get rid of her. If I had looked mournful, she would have said I grudged her these little pleasures. I am in the position of a man playing "pitch and toss" with a professional sharper. It is "heads" I lose, and "tails" she wins. I might be a country bumpkin taking a turn at thimblery or the three-card trick with the "long firm" at Ascot; or an amateur book-maker standing to lose whatever horse comes in first. However, it is all the same in the end; as Brillat-Savarin says, "What woman wills, God wills;" whether pleased or grieved, when my wife wants to do a thing she does it—she wanted to go, she went. *Verb. sap.*

Between ourselves, I must confess there is something exhilarating about a wife's first absence—one feels young again, like a schoolboy when the master is out of the room. There is a sense of freedom such as a caged bird must enjoy when let loose into the blessed sunshine; or as one can imagine a gipsy might feel when once more cooking a stolen fowl upon the hearth, after a month in the country gaol. In the joy of emancipation even the memory of one's old fetters give a thrill of pleasure. I recollected the morning after that infernal masonic dinner. O what a head I had! It wasn't my fault either. We dined steadily from half-past-eight to half-past-twelve, and there were about five and twenty courses. Then the toasts began; and we drank the healths of Masters and Past-Masters, and Grand-Masters, and Knights, and Worshipful Brothers. After that every mason sang a song, except one. He was a Babu. He said he could not sing, but he would recite. He recited "The first kiss of love." That Babu was master of humour; the first kiss of love made me laugh till I cried; and then the floor came up and hit me on the head. I had a headache when I woke. I yearned for a Europe morning, and a cup of tea in bed. My wife said I was to get up—I refused. She drew the curtain, and focussed the morning sun right in my eye. She deprived me

of my pillows, and then proceeded to clatter about the room ringing bells, and striking gongs, and clanging frying pans, till I was forced to bolt in self-defence. Ah! what Europe mornings I should have in her absence. "Qui hai! Bring the tea and cigarettes in here. The barber has come, has he? Let him shave me in bed."

Then there was that easel incident. My wife has a gimcrack which she calls an easel. She changes the pictures on it according to her fancy. The top of the easel is draped; on the top of the drapery is a furled Japanese umbrella; and there are imitation storks and spiders stuck about the edifice. My wife calls this man-trap her masterpiece. One evening, when piloting my way across the drawing-room, without a light, a spike of the umbrella jobbed me in the eye; this made me trip over a leg of the easel, and in my fall I knocked against a *papier-mâché* tea-poy, bearing a large jar with grass in it. As I lay on the ground, "all in jommethry," seeing sparks, with the *débris* of china, and storks, and umbrellas on the top of me, Mrs. Brown came and talked to me. She said a good deal about stupidity and carelessness, but never a word about my bleeding forehead. In the absence of its protector, I resolved to take that easel into a spare room, and have a round or two with it.

Then there was the occasion when, in a moment of good-fellowship, I invited young Dapper to come to take pot-luck with us. He came and the wife received us as if she intended to freeze us. I don't know what we had for dinner, but everything tasted like ice pudding. Our guest left early; he said he felt he had ague coming on, and then my wife wanted to know what I meant by bringing a man to dinner who had not called on her. And there was the time when I had Russian influenza, and my wife insisted I should go to a dance. She did not care about the dance, as a dance, she said, but it was a "select" ball, and if we were not there, people would say we had not been invited. O! the misery of that night... Well, it was over now, and I could do as I liked. The house should be a veritable Abbaye de Thélème, with "Fay ce que voudras" over every door

I saw my wife off in the afternoon, and might have been happy for about two-and-a-half days if it had not been for the *khansamah*. He used to steal in in the morning like a ghost, and give me quite a start by saying "*Hukm*?" in a sepulchral voice, when I did not even know he was in the room. "*Hukm*! You scoundrel, hook it." Then he used to go, and after a little would pop his head in again, and whisper "*kharch*." I shied the Civil Leave Code, the Public Works Bible, and the gazetteers of three districts at him, but it was no use. He was not happy unless he said "*hukm*" and "*kharch*" at least once a day.

After three days I experienced a curious revulsion of feeling, and wrote my wife a long and extraordinarily spoony letter. In reply to this letter she said it was evident that her absence was doing me a deal of good. I have come to the conclusion that a wife's absence is like a glass of champagne. There is no real body in it. It exhilarates at first, and leaves depression behind. The worst of it is, that with one wife one can't go on champagning. If a man had a dozen, and sent them off in rotation, it might be a different thing.

After a week I felt down on my luck and asked Horsey Hunter to dinner. After his fourth glass of port he warmed to his work. "Tell you what it is, John," he said oracularly, "you are like a horse that has broken loose from his stable, and has arrived at the gram-bucket stage."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. You resemble a loose horse. You have galloped around with your head and tail in the air; nibbled a bit of grass here and there; galloped again, and snorted, and kicked up your heels, and now you are tired of it. You won't confess it, but I am positive you are on the look-out for your syce to come rattling the gram-bucket, and lead you back again. Tell you what it is, old chap, you have been stall fed too long to care about a run at grass. You leave that to unbroken nags like myself. Just you get your syce back again, and keep quiet in your box."

I don't know that I much cared about this description of myself, but Horsey has this way of putting things.

After a fortnight, when I was turning over an old almirah looking for something I had mislaid, I came across some of my wife's dresses, and the touch, and the rustle, and the scent of them, made me feel queer. I shut up the press and returned to my den, with something like a lump in my throat. Another night when I had been sitting up late, I heard her call out to me as it were from the drawing-room. I stopped writing, and walked in there unthinkingly, to meet an awful silence . . . I came back and read "Aylmer's Field," and felt frightened. Then I telegraphed to her to come back.

My wife's train came in at four in the morning. We had a dance in the station that night, and I thought the simplest thing would be not to go to bed at all. The dance was over at two, and just because I had too much time, I happened to be about ten seconds late. My wife was already on the platform, with a heap of boxes, and bags and warps, and flower-pots, and shivering coolies around her.

"Are you ill?" she asked, eyeing me keenly."

"No."

"You're not. Then what do you mean by telegraphing in that ridiculous way?"

"I wanted you back."

"You wanted me back, and you could not meet the train in time?"

"We had a dance last night"—I began explaining.

"O, you were dancing, were you, when I imagined you dying in your bed?—No, don't touch me. Here is my baggage ticket, go and get my boxes out." As I worked my way through the confused and sleepy crowd I felt a disappointed man.

We drove home in a *gari*, with its centre of gravity about five feet above our heads, and it threatened to topple over at every corner. My wife wanted to know if I had arranged a carriage accident for her as a pleasant surprise. I told her she had been away so long that I had forgotten she generally carried a hundred maunds of luggage about with her. . . (Interval of two minutes). . .

"I suppose you have re-painted the drawing-room walls."

"I have not."

"H—m!"

"I did not know you wished it."

"You have aspinalled my dressing-table of course."

"No."

"I never asked you to do that either, I suppose?"

"Yes, I remember something about that."

"Then why didn't you do it?"

It had been a chilly morning, but the sunlight was beginning to break its way through the city smoke and fog, yet the drive home seemed colder than the journey to the station. Never mind, I said to myself, it will be all right when she sees the way I have arranged the drawing-room, and the new curtains I have put up. But this point which I reckoned would be my "Excalibur," proved my "Mont St. Jean."

"Hullo," she said, "who's been making hay in here? and what do you call those things over the door?"

"They are new curtains, dear; don't you like them?"

"Like them? They make me sick. Take them down at once, put them in your bathroom. Now go and send me a cup of tea in my dressing-room." Who was it that said "*Le genre humain n'est pass place entre le bien et le mal, mais entre le mal et le pire*?"

A woman once told me that she thought the chapter in Black's *Princess of Thule*, in which Sheila prepares the little Highland scene to win her husband back, and the result, as about the most affective thing in fiction she had ever read ; " You are a man," she added, " and I suppose men have not feeling enough to understand it." Haven't we ? There are men, besides Silas Wegg, capable of taking " a powerful sight of notice." Why is there always some flaw in this world's ways, gaudy insects with stings, and " goodly apples rotten at the core ? " when shall we be able to eliminate the poison and the worms ? " Not in this world," as Dickens puts it ; " let us hope it will be in the world that sets all right."



